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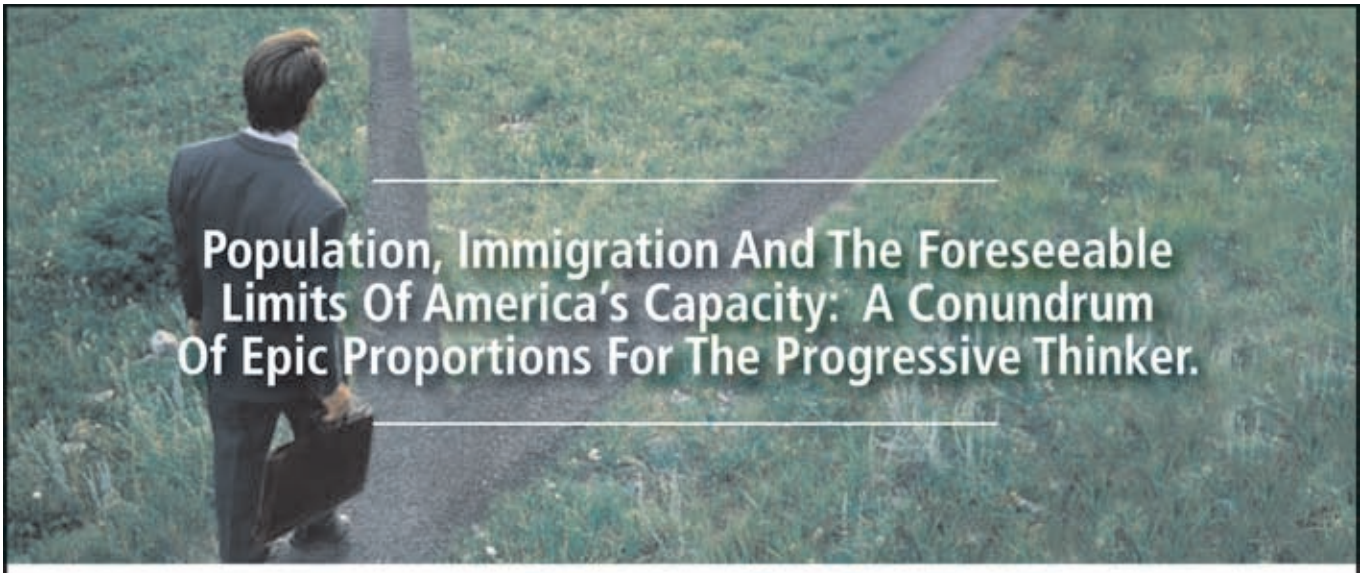

Population, Immigration And The Foreseeable Limits Of America's Capacity: A Conundrum Of Epic Proportions For The Progressive Thinker.

As America's population races from the current 300 million to a projected 400 million in the next 30 years*, progressive thinkers are confronted with a debate among themselves – and others – as to our nation's capacity to absorb natural population growth and growth due almost entirely to immigration. What price will we pay in terms of the environment? What will be the impact on resources from water to energy? What additional challenges will be created by this growth? What is our responsibility to future generations?

The Dots That Nobody Really Wants To Connect

People of virtually all major political persuasions agree that America has problems—huge problems. Air quality in many regions is a threat to health. Water is compromised and becoming scarce. Traffic in a number of metropolitan areas has arrived at a point that makes it unfixable. Infrastructure is a disaster waiting to happen. Who can argue with those observations? The disagreement arises when anyone makes the point that all of these problems are caused by a large and fast growing population, most of it unanticipated. The more people there are, the more challenging the problems become. These problems are acute with our population at the current level of 300 million. What happens at 400 million? Or 600 million?

The Misconception Of Inevitability

One prevailing thought for those who are willing to connect the dots is that meteoric population growth is inevitable. The pyramid is being built and there is nothing we can do about it. Population growth is destined to be exponential. But the reality is that Americans are having fewer children. The other reality is that America's future population growth will be driven by immigration. While immigration at some level will surely continue, there is a case to be made for taking another look at the numbers in order to maintain some order and common sense in the growth of our population.

At Some Point, You May Have To Make A Choice

We want it all. We want a clean environment, adequate natural resources, good housing, plenty of food, first-rate healthcare and so on. We also feel a need to welcome the world to our front door, or in millions of cases, our back door. But America is rapidly approaching the point of no return. Either we opt for preserving the quality of life that has attracted so many millions in the past by turning away some in the future. Or we continue to accept millions, knowing that our children and grandchildren will continue to pay a huge price.

Nobody wants to close the doors. Nobody wants to totally abandon our heritage of immigration and rich tapestry it has woven. But with more sensible numbers we could actually restore it. More and more progressive thinkers are saying it is time to connect the dots. To think about the future. To solve the conundrum that is placing so many like-minded thinkers in conflict.

America's Leadership Team for Long Range Population-Immigration-Resource Planning

300 million people today, 400 million in just 30 years. Think about it.

American Immigration Control Foundation	Californians for Population Stabilization	Federation for American Immigration Reform	NumbersUSA	Social Contract Press
www.aicfoundation.com	www.capsweb.org	www.fairus.org	www.numbersusa.org	www.thesocialcontract.com

*Based on 2008 Census Bureau projections

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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Bankrupt

THESE HAVE BEEN TERRIFYING DAYS—and not just because of the spectacle of the nation's financial infrastructure crumbling before our eyes. Our political elites were warned of the immediate need to restore confidence in a failing system. But, instead of acting, these elites (of both parties) balked, or behaved like buffoons. When asked to play a reassuring role, they turned in a deeply unsettling performance.

By now, the litany against the Republicans is well known. House Minority Leader John Boehner swung wildly from one position to the next. Facing the prospect of mutiny, and with his own credibility severely diminished, he made little effort to cajole his caucus into initially supporting the bailout. Instead of leading, he allowed the House Republicans to revive the lunatic blow-it-all-to-hell instincts of the Gingrich era, and at the worst possible moment. Boehner can share the blame for failing to control the destructive impulses of conservatives with George W. Bush, a man clearly defeated by monumental crises of his own making. Perhaps it is wise that he has so rarely shown his face these past weeks, and it is certainly wise that the bailout was known as the Paulson Plan—and didn't bear his own name. But, even for his detractors, it is horrifying to see a commander-in-chief so feeble and detached.

Alexis C. Glenn/UPI/Landov (Pelosi; Dodd); Kansas City Star/MCT/Landov (McCain); Jim Young/Reuters/Landov (Frank); Jim Mallin/Bloomberg News/Landov (Reid); Chuck Kennedy/MCT/Landov (Boehner); Daniel Gluskoter/UPI/Landov (Obama)

While the House Republicans have been a real fetter to the nation, Democrats haven't exactly draped themselves in glory, either. When it came to making the case for the bailout, they were strangely passive—shifting the onus of salesmanship to Bush. Responding to the initial rollout of the Paulson Plan, Nancy Pelosi told NPR, "This is clearly at their doorstep, and now they have a proposal, which is their solution to their problem, and we're eager to see why the president thinks this is the way to go." As a matter of tactics, you could see her logic. But, as a matter of staving off economic collapse, the logic was inexcusable. The national interest dictated that Pelosi do more than round up her share of votes. Democrats needed to help overcome the public's knee-jerk populism, making a strong case that the economy depended on this legislation passing quickly. This would have involved substantially reframing the terms of the debate. Just consider the language used by many of the bill's supporters—"troubled assets," "Wall Street bailout"—and it's no wonder that it provoked such outrage.

What's more, despite the significant improvements Democrats made to Paulson's initial plan, they failed to correct serious (but fixable) flaws. They should have forced Paulson to further clarify how the Treasury will buy the billions in toxic assets—a process that is ripe with potential for conflict of interest. And they failed to demand the one step that would speak most directly to the roots of the crisis and to their own constituents: that bankruptcy judges be given the ability to reset the terms of mortgages of homeowners threatened with foreclosure. Instead, they acceded to Republican provisions that will probably have little effect on the actual financial crisis.

Finally, there is the less than admirable performance of the presidential candidates. John McCain's appalling antics are amply documented. But, in the critical early stages of this crisis, both candidates declined to take a strong position on the bailout. During their first debate, they essentially dodged the issue and returned to making broad ideological arguments that hardly seemed suited to a moment of such dire consequence. If they had convincing arguments to make in favor of the bailout, they kept them to themselves. They hedged and, through their tepid rhetoric, helped craft the political conditions that predetermined the bailout's initial failure.

This $700 billion bailout won't solve the crisis (although it will sure help). It is a prelude to more fundamental arguments about the role of the state. And Democrats will need to quickly develop a fully rounded idea of what that will look like, in anticipation of this coming debate. These next months will be vital. Although not much in the way of legislation can be accomplished, arguments can be primed, coalitions can be assembled, and the public can be prepared. After all, if the polls hold, Democrats soon won't have the luxury of dismissing the economy as "their problem." They will own it. ◆

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putting America's energy resources to work

Meeting our nation's energy challenges — and responding to high prices Americans are paying at the pump — requires that we pursue an integrated set of solutions. We must moderate demand by using energy more efficiently. And we must also increase supplies by responsibly developing energy resources from a variety of different sources and locations — including right here in the United States.

It is estimated that there is enough oil and natural gas offshore and in non-wilderness and non-park lands in the United States — but currently ruled off-limits for production by the federal government — to fuel 50 million cars and heat nearly 100 million homes for the next 25 years.

A significant majority of Americans believe we should explore and produce these resources. For this to happen, however, Congress must act.

If Congress were to expand the areas available for active exploration, we could make more domestic energy available to Americans in the future, while sending a strong positive supply signal to markets today, potentially putting downward pressure on prices. It would also strengthen U.S. energy security by further diversifying Americans' energy portfolio, and therefore mitigating the impact of a disruption in any one producing region of the world.

The energy industry has evolved tremendously with more than 50 years of worldwide offshore exploration and production experience. With the technological innovations developed by ExxonMobil and other companies, the United States' offshore resources can continue to be developed safely and with minimal environmental impact.

For example, directional drilling enables us to develop large areas from a single location, minimizing the environmental footprint. Advances in subsea production ensure facilities remain safe and largely hidden from view. Technology currently in place in the Gulf of Mexico ensured there have been no significant spills during hurricane season over the past several years. We would apply these and other technologies elsewhere off U.S. shores, and preserve the safety, biodiversity and beauty of America's coastline.

Some claim that energy companies are letting leased acreage "lay idle." Not so. Companies like ExxonMobil incur real financial costs and risks when we pay the federal government significant sums to acquire and maintain a lease for a limited term. Naturally, we have every incentive — especially when prices are high — to explore and produce on the lands we lease as quickly as possible.

If leased acreage is promising, ExxonMobil is actively producing or evaluating it. The problem is that industry does not have access to some of the most promising acreage, so we are attempting to find new supplies from the limited offerings of the last ten years.

But drilling is only part of the solution to the energy challenges Americans face. It must be combined with improved efficiency, robust development of other economic energy sources, and other measures. By pursuing an integrated set of solutions, Americans can achieve a prosperous, secure and responsible energy future.

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End of an Error

The twilight of conservative rule.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Last year, I published a book describing how right-wing economics had come to dominate American politics. Whenever you write a book about something bad that's happening, you get asked for the solution. I'd shrug and admit that I didn't have one. The questioner would usually look slightly disappointed, so I'd add that nothing lasts forever, and eventually something will come along to change things. The financial crisis might be that something.

When liberals talk about turning economic lemons into political lemonade, the usual model is the New Deal. The free market failed, government swept in, and the political landscape was transformed. Of course, the economy has recessions all the time, and most of them fail to result in a New Deal. In 1982 and 1992, to name a couple of examples, lousy economic conditions led to major Democratic victories. But neither led to any major transformation, and each was followed, in 1984 and 1994, by blowout Republican wins.

Why did the Great Depression fundamentally change the nature of government? First, obviously (to quote Rodney Dangerfield in *Back to School*, when he was asked to characterize *The Great Gatsby*), it was, uh, great. The current downturn probably won't last anywhere near as long as the Depression. On the other hand, economic analysts are throwing around terms like "calamity" or "total meltdown" with a distressing frequency that we haven't seen in previous recessions.

Second, the Depression—as my colleague John B. Judis put it in *The Paradox of American Democracy*—"destroyed in one stroke the edifice of wisdom and invincibility that businessmen had erected for themselves." After the stock market crash of 1929, Americans saw rampant speculation and greed as the source of their ills. That kind of reaction generally hasn't happened since. The 2001 recession occurred because the tech bubble burst and terrorists struck; the 1991 and 1982 recessions were caused by the Federal Reserve; etc.

Today, the public is reverberating with revulsion for Wall Street, a sentiment powerful enough to have caught backers of the financial bailout by surprise the first time it came to a vote in the House. The polling firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner annually surveys the public for its sentiments toward "big corporations." Over the previous five years, unfavorable ratings have outscored favorable ones by an average of eleven percentage points. In the current survey, unfavorable ratings scored 25 points higher. And this is before the financial crisis has even had much impact on most people.

The New Deal ultimately triumphed because even Republican presidents—Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford—came to accept its basic premises. And this reflected the fact that corporations themselves grew comfortable with the New Deal, which many saw as a stabilizing force. In 1970, 57 percent of Fortune 500 executives told a poll that they wanted the federal government to "step up regulatory activities." Presidents of both parties enacted progressive tax reforms and major new regulations with nary a peep of protest from business.

Starting in the early '70s, business transformed itself into the aggressive, narrowly self-interested lobby we know today. You can read about how and why this happened in John's book or, preferably, mine. Suffice it to say that business's power has driven the rightward turn in American politics. Just as the New Deal survived Republican and Democratic administrations alike, so too has the era of conservative reaction that followed it. Republican governance has brought orgies of deregulation and upper-bracket tax cuts. Democratic governance over the last three decades has, at most, trimmed some of the wildest excesses.

It's been striking, then, to see corporations express such disgust in recent weeks with the GOP right. After two-thirds of House Republicans voted against the bailout, conservative economics writer James Pethokoukis of *U.S. News & World Report* noted, "I've heard from plenty of those folks, professional money managers and such, who are furious that the bailout/rescue plan went down to defeat yesterday and claim to be washing their hands of the GOP, at least for this election cycle. (But maybe longer.)"

There's nothing unusual about businesses cultivating support among both parties, or even tilting toward Democrats when they hold the majority. What's novel is that, rather than paying Democrats to leave them alone or cut their taxes or regulations, businesses have started to embrace government activism, just as they did during the heyday of postwar liberalism. Last year, my colleague Jonathan Cohn reported in *The New York Times Magazine* on how, unlike in 1994, business is now agitating for genuine health care reform. Likewise, writing in The New Republic, James Verini has described a similar movement on environmental policy ("The Devil's Advocate," September 24, 2007).

Meanwhile, conservatives have found themselves casting wildly about for solutions that fit their preconceived notions. Having searched frantically for a big government villain behind the free-market meltdown, the finger of blame settled upon the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, which requires banks to lend to low-income neighborhoods. (In fact, as economist Janet Yellen has pointed out, banks that are subject to the CRA made subprime loans at a dramatically lower rate than independent mortgage companies, which are *not* covered by the CRA.)

When asked at the first presidential debate how he would lead the country out of the financial crisis, McCain prattled on about earmark spending, which accounts for less than 1 percent of the federal budget. He gave the air of a man retreating from the world around him into the comfort of old bromides: Hey Grandpa, tell us that joke about bear DNA again.

That sort of dogma can carry the day when it's backed by a solid wall of business support. But corporations may be starting to realize that low taxes and low regulation may not define their long-term self-interest. "I've never seen anything like this," one investment banker told *The Washington Post*. "You've got two big investment banks saying, 'Please regulate me.'" What do you call it when a conservative gets mugged by rampant laissez-faire? Maybe, just maybe, the end of the era of conservative rule. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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Turning Japanese

Are we reliving Tokyo's economic nightmare?

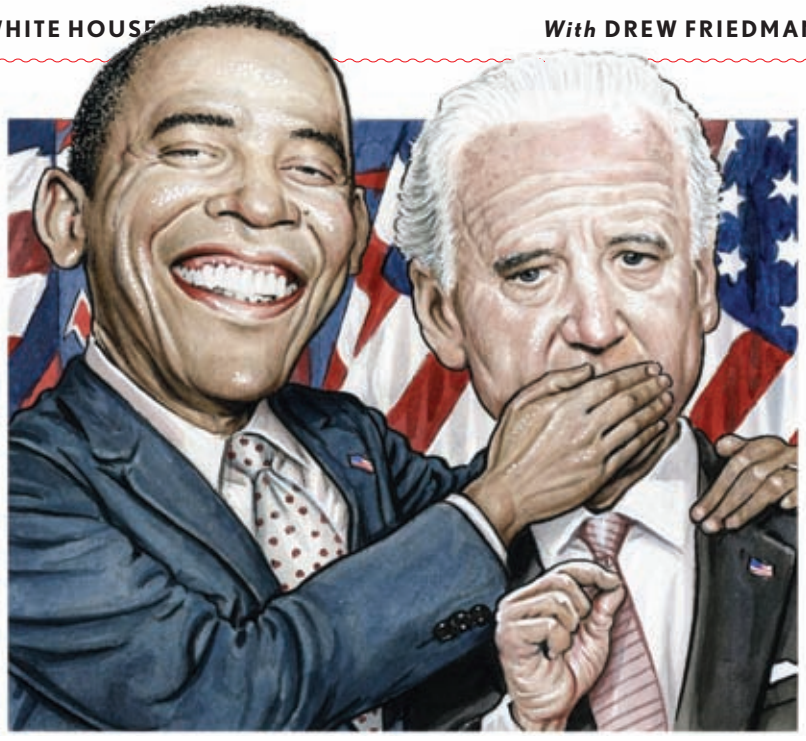
Whatever their squabbling in Washington this week, one thing Democrats and Republicans were able to agree on was the apparent novelty of the country's current financial woes. "We have an unprecedented crisis," said House Minority Leader John Boehner, in a phrase frequently invoked by other congressional leaders. But, in truth, the dire situation in the United States does have a precedent: It looks remarkably like the crisis that struck Japan 20 years ago, when a stock market meltdown exposed years of speculative lending, mostly dependent on real estate, and led to an economic collapse. In response, Japan's government launched a strategy that actually made the problem worse, leading to ten years of stagnation, which became known as Japan's "lost decade." The bad news is that, today, the United States may be making some of the same mistakes; the good news is that, just as Japan ultimately righted its economy, so can we.

Much like American financial institutions in the 2000s, Japanese banks in the 1980s loaned wildly, gambling on rising real estate prices. Quickly, a bubble built up. At one point in 1990, the value of land in Japan was reportedly greater on paper than the value of all the land in the rest of the world. But, in December 1989, the gamble failed, as the stock market turned down and investors realized how many bad loans the banks had made, many of them with Japan's overvalued land as collateral. Most Japanese banks became afraid to lend any more money, and capital dried up.

At first, Japan's leaders propped up the value of financial assets, convinced that the banks—intertwined as they were with Japanese corporations—were too important to fail. This protected Japan's ailing banks, allowing them to continue lending when they should have been cutting back. The government also started plowing money into the public sector to keep the economy alive. "The additional spending was largely directed toward public works projects, shoring up a weak financial system, and subsidies to the weakest of Japan's businesses, which, in retrospect, ought to have been allowed to fail," writes American Enterprise Institute economist John Makin. "While the direct stimulus of government works projects and subsidies to weak businesses kept the economy from falling back into negative growth for a time, the weakness resumed once the direct stimulative effects of the spending packages wore off."

Indeed, the stimulus just served as a smoke screen. Banks, never forced to acknowledge their mistakes, appeared healthier than they were, and companies that should have gone bankrupt stayed open. Initially, the strategy did produce a minor boost in growth, but the economy never regained its momentum. Worse, Japan became addicted to the idea of recovery without pain, so, for ten years, one Japanese prime minister after the next did what they could to keep the economy afloat through multibillion-dollar infusions. Yet banks never gained enough confidence to lend aggressively, weak companies barely stayed alive, and uncertainty kept consumers out of the stores. By 2000, Japan had piled up debt worth more than 150 percent of its gross domestic product, and average citizens were no better off—more than $10 trillion in wealth and savings destroyed since the early '90s.

WHITE HOUSE *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**



The Scranton Kid, amazingly on message.

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Fortunately, unlike Japan, which helped its banks hide their bad loans, the United States is taking a crucial first step by using taxpayer funds to help banks remove nonperforming loans from their books, in theory allowing them to once again lend. But, as in Japan, the bailout will do nothing to encourage financial institutions to change the business models that got them in trouble in the first place. Instead of accepting that weak actors, no matter how large, often must be allowed to fail, Washington has decided that many financial institutions, such as American International Group (AIG), are too large to go under—or, as the Fed put it, "in current circumstances, a disorderly failure of AIG could add to already significant levels of financial market fragility."

But this sends exactly the wrong message to the banking sector. If the practices that got you in trouble in the first place—in Japan, easy credit to cozy corporate friends; in the United States, rapid overexpansion and speculation on subprime loans—ensure you'll get bailed out, why change? In fact, in the wake of the bailout proposals, financial institutions like Bank of America, which just scooped up Merrill Lynch, will continue growing so large that they, too, can count themselves as "too big to fail." As University of Chicago finance professor Luigi Zingales told Bloomberg News, Bank of America's move will "definitely make [its] bonds safer" because Washington cannot let it collapse. "It is a pretty significant comparative institutional advantage." Yet there is no evidence that the waves of mega-mergers on Wall Street before the collapse made the banks better; it was independent investment bank Goldman Sachs that often posted the strongest results because it knew its strengths and successfully managed its risks—although it made some bad loans, it got rid of some of the worst before the crisis really hit.

Worse, the Bush administration has made no move to undo the decades of deregulation, most notably the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, that enabled the crisis. At the very least, it might have mandated disclosure rules that made it harder for Wall Street firms to hide bad assets, or created an independent agency to oversee the bailout, one not linked to the Treasury Department or the Federal Reserve. The bailout will simply transfer most of the risk to the government—and thus to taxpayers—and not actually punish the banks. In any final package, the U.S. government should have a significant equity stake in any company whose nonperforming loans it absorbs, giving it a greater say in how they are run.

That's what ultimately made the difference in Japan. In 2001, the country's maverick prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, slashed government spending and forced banks to cut nonperforming loans by creating a government body that allowed them to admit the loans had failed and still sell them off, thereby giving government more say in how banks were run. Koizumi's strategy "subjected [the banks] to more rigorous loan write-offs and forced changes in management," notes one study of Koizumi's first term, published in *Asian Perspective*. This changed the way Japanese banks operated, forcing them to scrutinize borrowers, even companies with which they had been cozy, and prompting them to overhaul their business models. For good measure, Koizumi's leading economic adviser declared in a high-profile interview that no bank was too big to fail—a warning to everyone in Japan's financial sector. By the first quarter of 2004, Japan's economy was growing at over 6 percent, one of the fastest rates in the industrialized world, and the stock market had risen by 50 percent over the previous year. Since then, Japan's economic recovery has continued, with the country growing by nearly 3 percent in 2006 and just over 2 percent in 2007.

Koizumi's strategies were actually based on lessons learned after America's savings and loan crisis, when nearly half of the country's S&Ls went out of business and the rest were forced to adapt their business models. "A central lesson to remember from the U.S. [S&L] experience is that . . . in the end, the principal use of public funds was to put institutions out of business," notes economist Benjamin Friedman in a study comparing the S&L crisis to Japan in the '90s. Today, public funds are being used to do the opposite—to keep companies in business regardless of whether they change their practices, meaning that, as in Japan, the government might have to intervene again in a few years. Japan was able to afford repeated infusions of state cash in part because it was an export powerhouse. But, in the United States, which already boasts $10 trillion in public debt and regular trade deficits, another round of bailouts would be truly catastrophic. It could doom the entire U.S. economy throughout the next president's term. A "lost decade," you might say.

Joshua Kurlantzick

Health of the State

President Obama, ignore this bailout.

In 1992, Bill Clinton ran for president promising a bevy of expensive spending initiatives: assistance for college tuition, new public works, not to mention a massive universal health insurance plan. "In the absence of increasing investment in this country," Clinton said, "you can't get growth going again." But critics insisted the budget had no room for such extravagances—a belief Clinton eventually embraced. "We're all Eisenhower Republicans here," he famously told his cabinet, as he signed off on a budget that ditched spending proposals in order to reduce deficits.

The parallels with 2008 are unmistakable. College tuition assistance, infrastructure spending, health care reform—they're all in Barack Obama's agenda. But, with the government likely on the hook for some kind of Wall Street bailout, critics say there's no way Obama can follow through. "How can you expand health care coverage when the country is broke?" Mike Allen and Jim VandeHei asked in *Politico*. Even Obama himself recently indicated that "a range of things . . . are probably going to have to be delayed."

All presidential campaigns overpromise. But the perception that Obama must radically pare back his ambitious spending proposals—a perception widely shared in Washington—makes several fundamental errors. For one thing, it misunderstands the nature of a Wall Street "bailout"—which, properly constructed, shouldn't seriously deplete federal funds. More important, the conventional analysis ignores the fact that we face deep economic problems besides the financial crisis—problems that only government can fix. The case for Obama's spending agenda hasn't suddenly become weaker. If anything, it's actually grown a bit stronger.

Consider what's happening on Wall Street—and why we even care about it. The worry is that banks will stop lending money, slowing down an economy that already seems to be in recession. The solution, many economists agree, is to put more money into circulation. Since the Federal Re-

ANTHONY RUSSO

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serve can't do that by reducing interest rates as it has in the recent past—rates are already very low—the government must inject money directly, by giving out more than it takes in. Tax rebates for the poor and middle class, who will likely spend the money quickly, are one way to do that; public assistance programs like unemployment insurance and Medicaid are another.

But it's not the quick economic stimulus that worries most observers. It's the initiatives that represent longer-term claims on the federal treasury. The college tuition assistance Obama has proposed wouldn't disappear after one or two years, when the economic downturn (hopefully) ends. Neither would the investment in early-childhood programs.

Obama would have the government grab some new revenue, too, thanks in part to a cap-and-trade scheme that would effectively tax pollution. If you grant the campaign some favorable assumptions, then, taken as a whole, his agenda might not change the government's year-to-year bottom line that much; in fact, annual deficits could even start to come down a little. But that would still mean producing budgets full of red ink. This year's shortfall, after all, should be more than $400 billion. And, since it was large deficits that helped convince the Clinton administration to forgo its spending initiatives, it's easy to see why many expect Obama to ditch his.

But is the budget picture really the same as it was back then? In some ways, it's actually better. The overall debt burden right now—that is, the total amount of money the government owes to creditors—is actually smaller, relative to the economy as a whole, than it was during Clinton's first year. Today, debt relative to gross domestic product is just 37 percent; in 1993, it was 50 percent. (The historical peak was 109 percent, during World War II.) Another key difference is interest rates, which are much lower today. So not only would Obama inherit a government less burdened by debt than Clinton's; he'd also inherit a government that could borrow new money more cheaply.

At the same time, the long-term picture Obama would face is just as bleak, if not bleaker. The reason is Medicare and Medicaid, whose cost is projected to increase much faster than inflation. Just meeting those obligations, along with promises made through Social Security, would soak up a huge amount of money. The government would inevitably have to borrow yet more to keep up, diverting money that might go to other purposes. Under this scenario, the Congressional Budget Office predicts that the country could actually start to get poorer—that is, national income would decline relative to inflation—sometime around 2060.

This means getting the budget under control in the long run remains imperative. But does that make Obama's spending plans unwise? Not really. That's because the culprit behind the rising cost of Medicare and Medicaid is the overall price of medical care, which the federal government currently has limited power to control. Ultimately, the only hope lies in a comprehensive reform of health care—one that reduces expensive overtreatment while creating a unified system in which it's possible for the government to exert more pricing power. And, while a reform like Obama's might not accomplish that right away, it would take the essential first steps.

Another way to prepare for future financial obligations is to help the economy grow faster, which would increase tax revenue and make the government's debt seem smaller by comparison. But, over the last decade, we've spent too little on educating our workforce and developing infrastructure essential to

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growth. We've also been too slow to focus on energy independence. It's imperative to make up for that neglect now, particularly given what's happened on Wall Street.

To take one obvious example, businesses could significantly lower their energy costs by updating their offices, stores, and factories to be more environmentally friendly. But that sort of retrofitting requires investing money upfront—money most businesses would have to borrow. And the financial crisis could make that borrowing a lot more difficult. By subsidizing those expenses with tax credits—an idea the Center for American Progress put forward in its $100 billion "Green Recovery" proposal—the government could make the retrofitting possible. This would help wean America off foreign oil while also creating jobs, thereby strengthening the economy.

To be clear, the next administration must remain wary of long-term commitments that won't pay off in improved efficiency or productivity. And that does call into question one element of Obama's agenda: his proposal to increase middle-class tax relief. While defensible as a temporary step to fight recession, it's less sensible as a permanent claim on federal revenues. Over the long run, it would arguably be less effective in spurring growth than investments for the common good—like education—that go underfunded when left to the free market. Plus it's quite likely that, in the long run, taxes will have to go up somehow. Cutting them now only makes that harder.

Arguing for spending in the current climate may sound controversial, but it really isn't—at least among Democratic policy experts. Although some Democrats (like economist James Galbraith and journalist Robert Kuttner) were making similar arguments to no avail during the 1990s, today even prominent Clinton administration veterans seem to agree in principle. In a recent *Washington Post* op-ed, former Clinton Treasury secretary Lawrence Summers advocated "short-run investments that will pay back to the government over time or those that are packaged with longer-term actions to improve the budget, such as investments in health-care restructuring."

Obama himself also seems to get it, notwithstanding his statement about delaying some projects. Speaking in Wisconsin on October 1, he said, "There are certain investments in our future that we cannot delay precisely *because* our economy is in turmoil." (The emphasis was his.) To prove it, he went on to promise spending on health care, education, infrastructure, and energy independence.

But Obama's personal commitment may count less than his political skills. More conservative voices, including many in Obama's own party, will insist the budget cannot accommodate such spending. In other words, they will act like it's still 1993. To persuade them otherwise, Obama would do well to remind them that their party has pursued different priorities before. Back in 1932, Franklin Roosevelt promised a balanced budget, then presided over one of the most famous federal spending binges in history. That turned out well, both for the party and the nation. There's no reason it can't happen again.

Jonathan Cohn

Northern Exposure

Sarah Palin's toxic paradise.

There's no reason to doubt Sarah Palin's sincerity when she talks about her commitment to family and—more specifically—special-needs kids. When she introduced her son, who has Down syndrome, to the audience at the Republican convention, the family tableau drew cheers. And she issued a promise. "To the families of special-needs children all across this country, I have a message for you," she told the crowd. "For years, you've sought to make America a more welcoming place for your sons and daughters, and I pledge to you that, if we are elected, you will have a friend and advocate in the White House."

Unfortunately, as governor of a state with a birth-defect rate that's twice the national average, and which has the gloomy status as repository of toxic chemicals from around the world, Palin has pursued environmental policies that seem perfectly crafted to swell the ranks of special-needs kids. It's true that Alaska's top leaders have placed industry wishes over environmental protection for years. But, instead of correcting this problem, she's compounded it. Peer into her environmental record, and Palin ends up looking a lot like George W. Bush.

In the past 20 years, research has shown that exposure to some metals and to chemicals such as pesticides, flame retardants, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) can cause birth defects and permanent developmental disorders both prenatally and in the first years of childhood. And Alaska is vulnerable to some of the worst environmental pollutants out there. In a state whose wealth depends on the exploitation of its natural resources, the toxic byproducts of mining and energy development, such as arsenic, mercury, and lead, are particular problems. Alaska Natives, such as the Inuit people, eat a diet that is heavy in fish, seals, and whales—animals that are high on the food chain and therefore more likely to be contaminated with high doses of PCBs and mercury. And the state is vulnerable not only to homegrown pollution, but also to industrial pollution: Trace gases and tiny airborne particles are contaminating the polar regions, carried there on atmospheric and oceanic currents, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The mess of pollutants in Alaska has clearly taken its toll. In general, the state has double the national average of birth defects. While the causes are unknown,

ANTHONY RUSSO; STEVEN KAZLOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES

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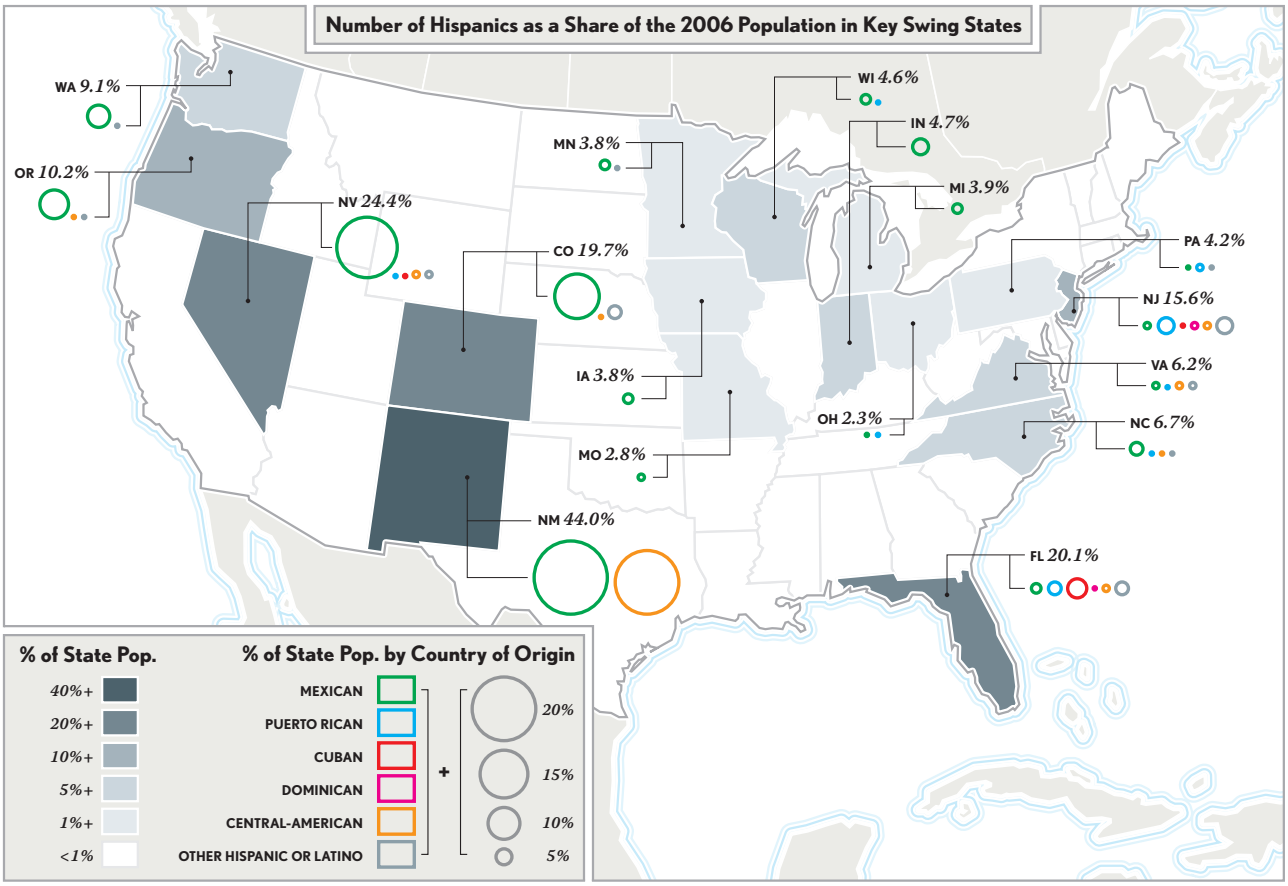
environmentalists point to the region that includes the North Slope, an area slightly larger than Minnesota, where most of Alaska's oil is produced. The byproducts of oil production can cause serious nervous system disorders, and the North Slope and its environs, home to Alaska Natives and itinerant oil workers, has the highest prevalence of birth defects in the state—11 percent—compared with 6 percent statewide and 3 percent nationwide.

Palin, however, has not addressed these concerns. Her administration irked environmentalists in February 2008, when it opposed legislation that would have given parents at least 48 hours' notice before schools were to be sprayed with pesticides and other toxic chemicals. Currently, parents get 24 hours, which the bill's proponents say is not sufficient for parents who want to arrange to keep kids out of school for a few days after the chemicals are applied. Palin's administration argued that the bill was too restrictive and would force schools to notify parents before cleaning toilets with disinfectant—which, supporters say, is not true. In the same month, members of Palin's administration testified against language in legislation that would have banned polybrominated diphenyl ethers—a flame retardant that, studies show, harms the developing brain.

Then, in the summer of 2007, Palin allowed oil companies to move forward with a toxic-dumping plan in Alaska's Cook Inlet, the only coastal fishery in the nation where toxic dumping is permitted. The Bush administration initially

Sí Se Puede

The nation's Latino population is rapidly increasing, and so too is their influence on the election. However, Latinos cannot be treated as a monolithic subgroup. In a state like Nevada, nearly all Latino voters are Mexican-American. But Cubans, typically far more conservative than other Latinos, are the predominant subgroup in Florida. New Jersey, Florida, and Pennsylvania have substantial Puerto Rican populations. Virginia has a fair number of Central Americans. And, in New Mexico, while more than 40 percent of the population identifies itself as Latino, only about half of that group identify as Mexican-American, whereas many others have a complicated mix of Mexican, Spanish, European, and Native American ancestry. Obama's campaign lagged with Latino voters in the primaries. But, if it can move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach, and make distinctive outreach efforts to different types of Latinos at the local level, they could prove to be the decisive swing group of the 2008 election. Already, some polls have Obama leading among Latinos by a two-to-one margin or better, a substantial improvement upon John Kerry's nine-point margin among Latino voters in 2004. *Nate Silver*



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OK'd the companies' request to increase toxic releases, but the permits could not be issued without Alaska's certification that the discharges met the state's water-quality standards, says Bob Shavelson, executive director of Cook Inletkeeper, an organization founded to protect the area's watershed. Palin complied. "Palin's Department of Environmental Conservation issued that certification [based on] the long-discounted notion that 'dilution is the solution to pollution'—turning the federal Clean Water Act on its head and actually increasing toxic pollution," Shavelson says.

Palin next took on the Clean Water Initiative, also known as Proposition 4, which appeared on the Alaska ballot on August 26. The measure would have limited the runoff of toxic metals—known to cause developmental and birth defects, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—from all mining operations, but it was aimed at stopping the proposed Pebble Mine, a huge mining proposal that was controversial for its potential impact on Bristol Bay, the world's largest commercial wild salmon fishery (for which Palin's oldest daughter was named). The project had been in the works for years, and, when she ran for governor in 2006, Palin told the *Alaska Journal of Commerce* that, if the mine was green-lighted, "there will be remediation from now to eternity." Once in office, though, environmental concerns took a backseat. In a TV interview six days before the vote, Palin said, "Let me take my governor's hat off for just a minute, and tell you personally, Prop 4—I vote no on that." Alaska's mining industry parlayed Palin's face and words into an advertising blitz—and came from behind to defeat it.

Palin's latest anti-environmental effort also came in August, when she attempted to block California's plan to curb its air pollution. The Golden State is trying to reduce its toxic emissions with a port fee that would pay for pollution-reduction projects around the state. Arguing that it would hurt Alaska's economy, Palin asked California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to veto the proposed legislation.

Finally, Palin was pushed by environmental activists and Alaska Natives to pressure the military in its cleanup of one of the most contaminated sites in Alaska—but the state didn't act. This was on the old Northeast Cape Air Force base on remote St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea—one of the state's closest spots to Russia. When the military closed its operations in the 1970s, it left thousands of barrels of toxic waste, containing solvents, fuels, heavy metals, pesticides, and PCBs, a group of toxic organic chemicals that have persisted in the environment. For the past few years, the Army Corps of Engineers has been slowly cleaning up parts of the site and claims it will leave it safe. (One federally funded study still in progress by the state's premier watchdog on chemical pollutants, Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT), tested the local water and got a reading that was more than one thousand times the level that the EPA considers safe. "If the Corps of Engineers want to fill up their canteens in there, they are welcome to it," says Kathrine Springman, the toxicologist who did that study. "Actually, I wouldn't want them to drink it … any more than I would ask them to drink Drano.")

But critics say the Army is taking too long, and that its plan will leave too many untreated chemicals, PCBs in particular, at the site. According to Pamela Miller, ACAT's executive director, Palin should have used her powers as governor to forge a better cleanup plan. "Certainly this was also a pattern in the Murkowski administration, but, under Palin, it's gotten worse," she said. "Her administration has done nothing to work with the military to avoid possible contamination." Scientists have also opposed the Army's plan, saying it will leave the area dangerous.

Supporters note that Palin did boost school spending for children with the most severe disabilities, but, in general, the Alaskan government under Palin has done nothing to protect those children and future generations from the toxic stew that the state has become. "She doesn't have a good understanding of the science," says Ruth Etzel, who until recently was research director at the Alaska Native Medical Program in Anchorage. "What she tends to do is talk about personal responsibility as the key to good health."

Andrea Doll, a Democratic state representative from Juneau, says she tried to get Palin interested in her bill on flame retardants early on: "I told her about the bill. She totally was not interested in any way, shape, or form. It was that look on her face—that 'don't even go there' look."

Sheila Kaplan and Marilyn Berlin Snell

Sheila Kaplan is an investigative reporter who divides her time between Washington, D.C., and Northern California. Marilyn Berlin Snell is a San Francisco–based investigative journalist. Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute.

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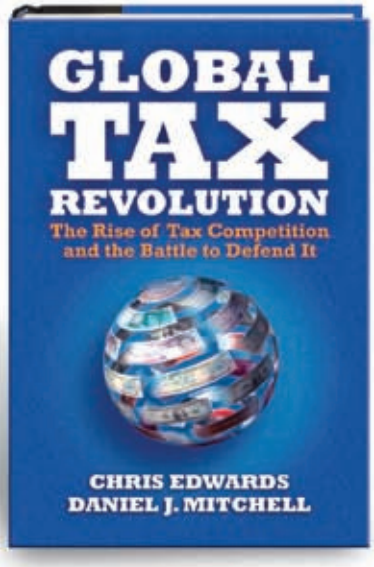

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Death Defying

Heroism's grip on the political subconscious.

JOHN B. JUDIS

GEORGE WASHINGTON: AP; ULYSSES S. GRANT: AP/MATHEW BRADY; DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER: AP; JOHN F. KENNEDY: AP; JOHN MCCAIN: AP

"THIS ELECTION," said John McCain's campaign manager, Rick Davis, on the second day of the Republican convention, "is not about issues." And he meant it. The convention that Davis helped assemble devoted strikingly little time to policy. Instead, the focus was on McCain's biography. Fred Thompson set the tone early in the convention, using his address to recount McCain's life story, especially his stint as a prisoner of war. In state delegation meetings during the week, the campaign enlisted the candidate's fellow POWs to tell delegates of his experiences in Vietnam. During McCain's acceptance speech—which also reflected on his years in captivity—delegates waved signs reading REAL AMERICAN HERO. McCain, the convention made clear, was not running for president based on foreign policy or economics—or ideology of any sort at all. He was running on heroism.

Democrats have tended to dismiss this strategy as a product of desperation—and, in some ways, it is. In a year when the issues dramatically favored his opponent, McCain had to find another organizing principle for his candidacy. But just because a strategy is born of desperation does not mean it is bound to fail. Even in the midst of war and economic distress, American political campaigns have often hinged on character as much as issues. And, throughout U.S. history, voters have frequently looked for heroes in their presidential candidates. McCain, moreover, isn't just any old hero. His life story—which includes a narrow escape from death, followed by a resurrection story of sorts—resonates with Americans' deepest fears and hopes about their own mortality. The psychology of heroism, it turns out, is capable of exerting a powerful pull on American voters. It may help explain why McCain outlasted his better-financed foes in the Republican primaries—and why, in a year when the Democratic nominee should by all rights be crushing his Republican opponent, Obama hasn't been able to put McCain away.

AMERICA'S FOUNDERS made character count in presidential elections, devising the office of the presidency to combine the functions of king (that is, head of state) and prime minister. George Mason called the presidency an "elective monarchy." Today, the presidency continues to combine these two offices, which are separate in parliamentary systems. As prime minister, the president sets policies and directs government; but, as head of state, he is also a symbol of the aspirations of the people. Accordingly, both policy *and* character typically play a role in presidential campaigns.

Voters look for different kinds of presidential character. Sometimes, they look for candidates they can identify with—candidates whom they see as "one of us." Harry Truman, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush fit that bill. Sometimes, they look for strong and caring parental figures—like Franklin Roosevelt or Ronald Reagan. But many times they have looked for heroes, and particularly military heroes. All in all, 13 presidents—from George Washington to Andrew Jackson to Ulysses S. Grant to George Bush the elder—have been elected primarily or partly on the basis of their status as military heroes.

Not all of these heroes turned presidents were the same, however. To be clear about McCain's appeal, we need to distinguish among four varieties of heroism, with the proviso that some heroes will qualify for more than one variety. First, there are heroes as *models of success*—Michael Jordan in basketball, Meryl Streep in acting, Steve Jobs in business. They are individuals whom people want to emulate. They don't necessarily exhibit any commendable moral qualities or leadership ability, although a conviction for child abuse or a betting scandal can dim their luster.

Second, there are heroes as *effective moral-minded leaders*. Generals like Washington and Dwight Eisenhower fit this mold. They are admired and respected for their leadership ability, but are not necessarily models because their achievements are seen as being beyond the aspirations of an ordinary individual. They are the objects of what Thomas Carlyle, in his book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, called "transcendent admiration."

Third, there are heroes as *death-defying moral exemplars* who risk their lives to save others or to adhere to a high moral standard. These would include Medal of Honor winners and the passengers of United Flight 93. John Kennedy, of PT-109 fame, fit this category when he was running for president.

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Finally, there are heroes as *death-defying world-historical leaders* who physically risk themselves to save or advance a people or a country. These include Jesus, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King. These are the rarest, and most esteemed, of heroes. In an August 2001 Harris Poll that asked respondents to name their heroes, three of the top five choices were this kind of figure.

McCain fits the profile of the death-defying moral exemplar. He was not acting as leader of a nation or a people when he was imprisoned at the Hanoi Hilton. His heroism consisted of inviting torture and risking his life for the sake of upholding the military code, which forbade him to accept release while POWs who had been imprisoned before him continued to be held. But, while McCain's actions don't match those of the world-historical leader, they still strike a plangent chord with the public. Why? The reason, it turns out, has a lot to do with the fear of death.

Hero worship as a whole is probably rooted in early feelings about one's parents—a child's first models of success and leadership—but admiration of death-defying heroes reaches more deeply into the psyche. It, too, is informed by early feelings about fathers and mothers, but it also derives implicitly, or sometimes explicitly, from our fear of death. Thoughts about death are not usually conscious, but they nevertheless play an important role in our reaction to people and events. Fear of death, wrote Ernest Becker in his Pulitzer Prize–winning book, *The Denial of Death*, "must be present behind all our normal functioning, in order for the organism to be armed toward self-preservation. But the fear of death cannot be present constantly in one's mental functioning, else the organism could not function."

What is important about death-defying heroes is that they are seen as having been able to overcome their own fear of death. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James wrote, "No matter what a man's frailties otherwise may be, if he be willing to risk death, and still more if he suffer it heroically, in the service he has chosen, the fact consecrates him forever. Inferior to ourselves in this or that way, if yet we cling to life, and he is able 'to fling it away like a flower' as caring nothing for it, we account him in the deepest way our born superior. Each of us in his own person feels that a high-hearted indifference to life would expiate all his shortcomings." Becker made a similar argument in *The Denial of Death*. "Heroism," he wrote, "is first and foremost a reflex of the terror of death. We admire most the courage to face death; we give such valor our highest and most constant adoration; it moves us deeply in our hearts because we have doubts about how brave we ourselves would be."

One way to gauge the depth of this kind of hero-worship is to look at its prevalence in classical mythology or religion. These are universal barometers of our deepest fears and wishes. The first mythological heroes, as psychologist Otto Rank pointed out, always combined the mortal and the immortal. Later, the great mythic heroes had to endure repeated tests and conquer their fear of death in order to triumph. Theseus could only return to found Athens after slaying the Minotaur. Aeneas had to journey to the Underworld before founding Rome. Other mythic and religious heroes not only confronted death, but actually died and rose again. Becker describes Christianity as a competitor of several mystery cults of the Eastern Mediterranean, which, like it, featured a "divine hero … who had come back from the dead."

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell's extensive study of myth and religion, he writes that "everywhere … the really creative acts are represented as those deriving from some sort of dying to the world; and what happens in the interval of the hero's nonentity, so that he comes back as one reborn, made great and filled with creative power, mankind is also unanimous in declaring." McCain, of course, is not Aeneas, and his experience in Hanoi was not the stuff of myth. But much of his story's appeal comes from the same psychological sources that drew ancients to their culture's prevailing myths, and—ironically, given that conservatives have frequently accused Obama of presenting his candidacy in messianic terms—the same sources that still draw believers to the story of Christ's heroism and resurrection today.

McCain's story, like those of ancient heroes, hinges on his brush with death—what came before, during, and after. First, there is his pre-heroic period: McCain as carefree adventurer and lover. Like Odysseus (who tried unsuccessfully to feign madness in order to avoid fighting in Troy) or Buddha (who spent his first 29 years luxuriating as a prince) he did not seem clearly possessed of the qualities that would later distinguish him. "In high school and the Naval Academy, John earned a reputation as a troublemaker," recounted Fred Thompson in his convention speech, before going on to note that "in flight school in Pensacola, he did drive a Corvette and date a girl who worked in a bar as an exotic dancer under the name of 'Marie, the Flame of Florida.'"

Second, there is the period of "dying to the world," characterized by withdrawal—in McCain's case, into prison—and by the threat of death. Here is Thompson describing McCain's early days in the Hanoi Hilton: "His other broken bones and injuries were not treated. John developed a high fever and dysentery. He weighed barely a hundred pounds. Expecting him to die, his captors placed him in a cell with two other POWs who also expected him to die." In McCain's own speech, he said, "I was dumped in a dark cell and left to die." (McCain's speech contained eight references to individuals, including himself, dying or facing death. Obama's speech in Denver contained one.)

Third, there is the period of McCain's rebirth and re-emergence. After McCain returned home a "national hero," Rudy Giuliani said in his convention speech, "he had earned a life of peace and quiet, but he was called to public service again, running for Congress and then the Senate as a proud foot soldier in the Reagan revolution." Note Giuliani saying that McCain was "called to" public service, as if he ran for office not out of ambition, but in response to a summons from on high. McCain himself described his captivity as being "blessed by misfortune." It transformed him. As he put it in his convention speech, "I fell in love with my country when I was a prisoner in someone else's. … I was never the same again. I wasn't my own man anymore. I was my country's." McCain, like the great religious figures, had abandoned his mortal self. It became merged, however, not with a people or a religious group, but with a nation.

The difference between McCain and other recent war heroes turned politicians lies in the continuity he has established between his acts of heroism and his later political life. McCain has successfully portrayed his brush with death as the foundation of his selflessness. "I do believe that when you look back at my history, it's just remarkable that with all the things I've been through that I'm still here," McCain told Scott Pelley of "60 Minutes" last month. "And I interpret that as an opportunity to serve a cause greater than my self interest." In other words, the man willing to lose his self became the selfless politician who put "country first."

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In the 2004 election, John Kerry attempted to parlay his own heroism in Vietnam, for which he received a Silver Star, into political success. Like McCain, Kerry was a death-defying moral exemplar. Like McCain, Kerry dedicated much of his convention to telling his story. But, ultimately, Kerry's strategy did not work. Most Democrats assumed later that Kerry was thwarted by the scurrilous Swift Boat ads that questioned his heroism. But the real problem lay in Kerry's inability to establish thematic continuity between his heroism and his political life. His antiwar activity after returning home (which, at the least, required explanation) and his justifiable reputation as a political flip-flopper (which suggested a lack of courage) posed problems in this regard. As a result, Kerry's heroism didn't resonate the way McCain's has.

To be sure, McCain's recitation of his own heroism is contrary to the ethos of heroism. The hero, exemplified by George Washington, is supposed to be modest in retelling his exploits. In *Revolutionary Characters*, Gordon S. Wood quotes a Frenchman marveling about Washington: "He speaks of the American War, and of his victories, as of things in which he had no direction." The hero—again typified by Washington, who astonished his compatriots in 1783 by abandoning public life—is also not supposed to take advantage of his renown. To do so would be to exploit his reputation for being above self-interest to achieve a self-interested objective—a blatant contradiction. But McCain published an autobiography in 1999, which he and his staff promoted at campaign appearances during the 2000 primaries; and, during this year's Republican primaries, his campaign featured a twelve-minute video highlighting his captivity and survival, as well as appearances by his fellow POWs.

McCain has tried to get around this problem by sometimes downplaying his heroism. "A lot of prisoners had it worse than I did," he said in his convention speech. And he has continually insisted that he speaks reluctantly of his own experience. When an ABC News reporter asked him this summer whether his time as a POW qualified him to be president, McCain "bristled" at the question. Later, he explained to the reporter, "I kind of reacted the way I did because I have a reluctance to talk about my experiences." Historians, surveying McCain's career, are unlikely to be convinced by such protestations, but the public seems to have accepted them. It has focused on McCain's heroism rather than on the fact that he and his campaign are using it to their advantage.

Last April, Gallup ran a poll that asked people about McCain's heroism and how it affected their view of him. That poll, taken well before the campaign had begun massively advertising, confirms that much of McCain's appeal lies in his reputation as a hero. Sixty-six percent of respondents thought McCain was a "war hero," including 58 percent of Democrats. Thirty-eight percent said that McCain's military service made it more likely they would vote for him, and 15 percent said it was a "major factor" in their support. Those who said it was a "major factor" included 14 percent of independents and 10 percent of Democrats.

There were no similar polling questions after the Republican convention. Instead, pollsters, who seem to take their cue from cable news, were obsessed with measuring Sarah Palin's effect on the GOP ticket. Perhaps as a result, few observers seem to have considered the very likely possibility that McCain's post-convention bounce was caused less by Palin—whose popularity, after all, is largely limited to right-wing Republicans—and more by McCain's relentless efforts at the convention to reinforce his image as a hero.

But, even if the perception of heroism was responsible for McCain's post-convention bounce, it's far from clear whether it will be enough to carry him across the finish line ahead of Obama. McCain's status as a hero is wrapped up with the kind of nationalism ("country first") most dramatically inspired by a quasi-religious understanding of foreign policy as a struggle between good and evil. And, since voters' attraction to McCain's brand of heroism is triggered in part by concerns about their own mortality, it is bound to be strongest when foreign threats are at the forefront of political debate. At the moment, however, foreign policy and the specter of terrorist attacks have been overshadowed by a financial crisis and an economic downturn. These constitute less favorable terrain on which a war hero can stake his reputation.

And yet that doesn't mean he can't try. When McCain recently suspended his campaign and announced he was returning to Washington to help solve the financial crisis, many commentators saw a desperate politician trying to reassure voters that he really did care about economics. But there was more to it than that. McCain was trying to change the subject of the presidential campaign from economic policy to leadership—from issues to character. By dramatically swooping into Washington as if he alone could resolve the crisis, McCain was doing exactly what had worked so well for him at the GOP convention: He was reasserting his heroism. He did the same thing at last week's debate, beginning his closing statement with the following words: "When I came home from prison . . ." Will this gambit succeed? Who knows what will happen on November 4, but heroism as political strategy has so far kept McCain close in a year when no Republican should have had any shot at capturing the White House. And, in that sense, it has already worked. ◆

JESSICA GRIFFIN/MCT/LANDOV

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Barracuda

The resentments of Sarah Palin.

NOAM SCHEIBER

It's unlikely the name Sarah Palin would mean much to anyone if not for a man named Nick Carney. Long before she stood up to Republican cronies and "the good old boys" of Alaska, Palin stood up to Carney, a colleague on Wasilla's city council. As Kaylene Johnson explains in her sympathetic biography, *Sarah*, Carney had the gall to propose an ordinance giving his own company the city contract for garbage removal. In Johnson's telling, it was the first time Palin bravely spoke truth to power: "'I said no and I voted no,' Sarah said. 'People should have the choice about whether or not to haul their garbage to the dump.'" Johnson writes that Palin's vote made Carney into a "political enemy"—the first of many, it turns out.

The episode might serve as a compelling, if small-bore, example of Palin's reformer instincts. Except that, according to those who were present, Carney wasn't quite the crooked trash magnate Palin makes him out to be. For one thing, Carney couldn't have proposed the ordinance because he'd recused himself from the matter. The council, in fact, had asked him to appear as a kind of expert witness on the relevant rules and regulations. "I looked at it as we actually had an expert on the council sharing the information," recalls Laura Chase, a fellow councilwoman. "Not … conspiring over a contract. There was no way that was happening."

So if it wasn't a sinister garbage conspiracy that put Carney in Palin's crosshairs, what was it? At first glance, the two would have appeared to be allies—both had spent most of their lives in Wasilla and had attended the same high school. But, beyond that, they were sociological opposites in almost every respect. Whereas Palin had bounced around several no-name colleges before graduating from the University of Idaho, Carney held a degree from Dartmouth. Palin seemed preoccupied with her family and church when she entered politics. Carney was preoccupied with histories of the Civil War and World War II (he later contributed a self-published book to the genre) and savored the *New York Times* crossword puzzle. By the time he joined the city council, Carney had traveled to Asia, Australia, and Central America. He'd run the Anchorage office of Alaska's economic development agency and had served as the state's agriculture director. "I'd dealt with larger budgets by far than the city of Wasilla," he recently told me.

Carney had a wry sense of humor. He was fond of joking that he'd graduated from Wasilla High School in the "top 20 percent"—by which he meant he was valedictorian of his five-person class. Sometimes Palin was the only colleague who didn't get his jokes. "I don't think he had too much patience for her lack of understanding," says John Stein, then the town's mayor. In internal discussions, Carney would be relentlessly logical while Palin was vague and intuitive. "Nick had a way of being direct and to the point, something that Sarah was uncomfortable with," recalls Chase. Which is to say, when it came to garbage removal, what Palin seemed to have chafed against was less the substance of Carney's position than what she felt was his elitist, Ivy League bearing. And, over the next few years, she found ways to get him back.

These days, Palin is engaged in this same fight against elites, though on a considerably larger stage. "I'm not one of those who maybe came from a background of, you know, kids who perhaps graduate college and their parents give them a passport and give them a backpack and say go off and travel the world," she recently told Katie Couric. "No, I've worked all my life." That hardly makes her the first politician to run on class resentments—nearly every conservative from George W. Bush to Mitt Romney has sought a bond with voters by attacking the over-educated and entitled. But more often than not these conservatives are

David Cowles

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elites themselves; hence the spectacle of Yale legacies and Harvard millionaires (and most of the Fox News executive suite) railing against wine-swilling sophisticates.

Palin, by contrast, may be the first conservative politician since Nixon to experience resentment so authentically. For her, it's not so much a political tool as a motivating principle. A trip through Palin's past reveals that almost every step of her career can be understood as a reaction to elitist condescension—much of it in her own mind.

Before he became her enemy, Nick Carney was actually Palin's mentor—though, like John McCain, his reasons for championing her had much to do with his own political agenda. In the early '90s, Carney and a group of local business leaders decided the city needed a sales tax to fund public services—such as a police force—it could no longer live without. To advance this position in an area not exactly teeming with Great Society liberals, they'd formed a group called "Watch on Wasilla" and persuaded John Stein, then the mayor, to embrace their cause. Carney won his seat on the city council in 1992 on the back of these efforts.

Heading into that election, Carney and Stein realized their program would go nowhere if they couldn't connect with what you might call Wal-Mart moms—that great mass of voters too busy earning a living and raising their families to follow local politics. "We were lacking lines of communication between the council as it existed and the younger bloc of voters in town," recalls Carney. "We didn't have anyone on there who worked [as a laborer] for a living or who was a housewife."

Carney's daughter had gone to high school with Palin; Stein and his wife knew her from an aerobics class they attended. She seemed bright and energetic and had a winning way about her—the same qualities McCain would notice 15 years later. They invited her to attend a "Watch on Wasilla" meeting and, after a brief interview, asked her to run on their moderate plank. Carney introduced her to local business leaders and campaigned alongside her. "I took her around … and said, 'This is a person who supports our points of view. She'll do what she can to make the police force run.' And she did it." It was a bit like Palin's convention rollout in miniature, and the initial effect was similar. Palin breezed into office with Carney that October.

Palin's first year or two on the council went smoothly by all accounts. "I was relatively pleased at the fact that she did communicate back and forth to that group," Carney says. "She would make good decisions." But, in retrospect, there were signs of tension. Though council members routinely bickered with one another, Palin became defensive when she

was on the receiving end. "Sarah is intimidated, in my personal opinion, by people who are intelligent," Laura Chase says.

The city had traditionally put up part of the purse for the Iron Dog competition—the grueling, 2,000-mile snow machine race that usually starts in Wasilla—and one year the council considered upping its ante. (First prize could be tens of thousands of dollars.) When a colleague pointed out that Palin should recuse herself because her husband was a perennial Iron Dog contender, she protested, "I don't think I have a conflict of interest here because Todd won it last year. There's no guarantee that he's going to win it this year." As others chimed in to explain the problem, Palin dug in her heels. "Well, it could be perceived that way, but it isn't," she harrumphed.

As a rule, the city's department heads attended every city council meeting. One evening, as the session wound down, Palin mentioned to Mary Ellen Emmons, the library director, that something had been bothering her—a book she thought was overly indulgent of homosexuality. "She said there was no room in our library for that kind of stuff," recalls Chase. Emmons curtly disagreed, but Palin was adamant. She suggested the librarian could at least keep such books in the reference section, where visitors would have to request them. "We don't believe in censoring books," Emmons finally told her, at which point Palin trailed off muttering.

Palin also butted heads at times with Dick Deuser, the city attorney. Deuser was not your average small-town lawyer. He'd attended law school at the University of Minnesota and had worked for a prominent Anchorage firm. At one point, the council asked him about the legality of banning group homes—such as shelters for runaways—a position Palin championed. Deuser had an academic manner and was fond of citing Supreme Court precedent. When he explained that a ban would be unconstitutional, Palin appeared impatient with such legal niceties. "I would describe it this way: Sarah was not an in-depth person. Never has, never will be," Deuser says. "Her instincts are political as opposed to evaluative."

That Palin would feel threatened by the more urbane members of the community is no surprise given her upbringing. Late one September morning in Wasilla, I met a high school classmate of Palin's named Perry Cowles, a warm, scruffy-looking man with a soul patch and hipster glasses. Cowles overhauls hot rods for a living, and his shop sits at the front of a three-acre lot. A few hundred yards back is his residence, which he described to me as "a typical Alaska house: seven hundred feet of living space; five thousand feet of garage space."

For lunch, Cowles took me to a restaurant near the top of Hatcher Pass, a fearsome peak from which, on a clear day, you can see the Knik River off in the distance. He flipped through his high school yearbook while we ate. Almost every page reminded him of another classmate who'd passed away—one who died when his prop-jet crashed, another who drowned in a lake. I got the sense life in small-town Alaska was somehow more precarious than in the lower 48.

Or, for that matter, in Anchorage. Though it's only 45 miles away, Anchorage can feel like an alternate universe—a far more affluent and cosmopolitan one at that. In Wasilla, the resentment has sometimes been intense. Cowles had

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been a hockey player in high school. In those days, the town had a single outdoor rink, which he and his teammates would mop after games and practices. He jokingly recalled how the Anchorage teams would show up in their parents' new cars wearing $200 skates "while we had tennis shoes with butter knives." "I'll never forget—we had a game with a team we were outmatched against," Cowles told me. "Our coach said, 'We can't win. But you go out there and I want blood. I want you to teach these rich kids a lesson.' And we did."

Palin nursed a milder form of this grievance as a high school basketball player. When Palin's coach, Don Teeguarden, arrived at the school in 1976, there were only 300 students and the team was abysmal. To improve, Teeguarden scheduled the powerful Anchorage teams, which, he told me, "was a pretty easy sell" for a no-name like Wasilla. By the time Palin was playing for him a few years later, the Wasilla girls had improved significantly—becoming a state power in their own right—but they still sometimes struggled to be taken seriously. "It was easy to put that small school chip on our shoulder," says Teeguarden. "If an Anchorage school came to Wasilla and we won, it was like it didn't count because they had to travel forty miles. To really get much respect from the Anchorage press, we had to go into town and win."

Palin's church, the Wasilla Assembly of God, also marked her as an outsider. The modern Pentecostal tradition traces its roots to a grassroots religious fervor at the start of the twentieth century. In the ensuing decades, followers tended to be less educated and affluent than their Protestant brethren. The tradition is also more democratic, in that it emphasizes a direct connection with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Hence the Pentecostal practice of speaking in tongues (in which congregants are moved by the Holy Spirit to speak in unfamiliar languages) and the laying on of hands (in which congregants invoke the Holy Spirit and heal one another with their touch).

Paul Riley, the church's founding pastor, personally epitomized the overlay of religion and class in Wasilla. Since Riley's work as a minister wasn't lucrative enough to support his family, he spent years moonlighting as a school bus driver while his wife worked in the post office. He sometimes endured the sneering of local elites. In 1980, he decided to construct a building large enough to house a 1,000-member church—a far bigger flock than he had at the time. It was a massive undertaking that took four years to complete and required $1 million in capital, even with the help of dozens of volunteers from around the country. "I had one banker that was concerned about me," Riley told me. "He said, 'What'll happen if you can't pay back the loan?' I said, 'We'll be here when you're gone.' The honest truth: He was gone before the church was finished. The bank went belly-up. . . . I just felt in my own heart that God was giving us direction."

Against this backdrop, Palin suffered her own petty slights and indignities. Growing up, she'd been pushed to great lengths by her hard-charging father, Chuck Heath. Heath had competed in the Boston Marathon and would lead his brood on grueling runs through the Mat-Su Valley. He had exacting standards for his children, sometimes higher than his daughter could deliver on. Palin was, according to classmates, an above-average basketball player, but hardly a star. Even as a junior, she found herself languishing on the JV team.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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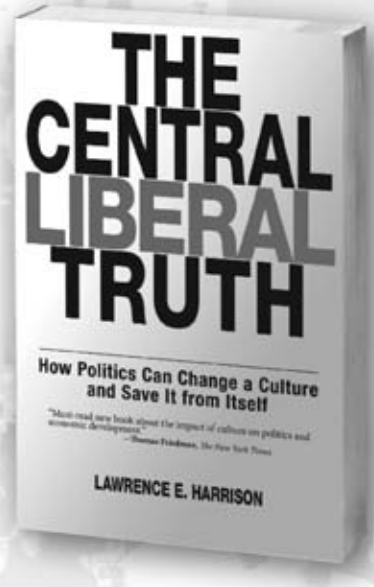

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But Palin compensated for what she lacked in talent (and height) with a freakish intensity. When I asked Elwyn Fischer, another classmate, how Palin got the nickname "barracuda," he thought it had to do with "that little grin thing she does." "She sets her teeth, it looks like she's eating jerky," Fischer said. "Flashing some fang, you know." Teeguarden allowed that "as a young player—freshman, sophomore—she was a bit foul-prone. . . . She wasn't about to back down. I'm guessing it was connected to those kinds of things."

Palin is often described in profiles as an academic standout. But, as on the basketball court, she was good but not great. Like most high schools, Wasilla had several distinct subcultures—among them, a religious/jock clique, of which Palin was a part, and a group of more bookish kids that took AP classes and studied theater. "We were considered the geekier, nerdy kids. We were smarter," recalls Elle Ede, another classmate. And yet Palin didn't lack for academic ambition. Rodger Foreman, one of her English teachers, would allow students to appeal their exam grades if they felt they'd been scored harshly. Foreman recalls that Palin regularly availed herself of the appeals process. "She was kind of like that. She thought she was right."

By 1996, a cultural shift in Alaska had emboldened Palin to take on Carney and Stein and enforce her own sense of right. Since it came online in the 1970s, Alaska's oil pipeline had attracted legions of Sunbelters—oil men from Oklahoma, Texas, and Louisiana. They were largely right-wing evangelicals who preferred Wasilla—where land was cheap, zoning was minimal, and taxes were low—to the more uppity environs of Anchorage. Their presence led to a proliferation of conservative churches and anti-government attitudes. By 1994, the same Republican tide that swept the Democrats from Congress had reached the Mat-Su Valley as the conservative hordes came of age.

In 1996, Palin was also asserting herself more and more. For example, she'd demand to know why Stein, the mayor, had "raised the budget." Stein and Carney tried to explain that he'd done nothing of the kind—that, when a city grows, businesses collect more in tax revenue, but that new residents also increase demand for public services. Palin wasn't appeased. She'd say things like, " 'Oh, okay. Well, that's the way you think about it,' " Stein recalls. "I was thinking—these are things she should know better. Why is she asking me these stupid questions?"

Carney saw ulterior motives. During a break one evening, he stopped Palin as she was heading to the restroom. "Sarah, it sounds like you're running for mayor," he said, half-joking. Palin turned red and became visibly upset. "What makes you say that? I never said I was running for mayor." "You never denied it," Carney responded. Palin just repeated herself and stomped off.

Within a few months, Palin was officially challenging Stein and exploiting the cultural shift masterfully. She welcomed a national anti-abortion group in to carpet bomb Wasilla with pink postcards affirming her pro-life bona fides. She orchestrated an NRA endorsement and a mailing from the group falsely proclaiming Stein, a lifelong hunter, "anti-gun." (Stein complained to the local newspaper that Palin was telling voters he wanted to "melt down" all the firearms in the state.) And, in a move practically out of Karl Rove's playbook, she dwelled on how Stein's wife used her maiden name, going so far as to demand a marriage certificate as proof of their nuptials. Palin's campaign literature proclaimed her "deeply devoted to conservative family values"—all in the context of an ostensibly nonpartisan election. (Stein himself was a moderate Republican.)

Upon winning, Palin moved quickly to punish her snooty tormentors. Days after she was elected, the city council became deadlocked over how to fill two seats—Palin's and another that had opened up when its occupant won higher office. Palin insisted on making her own appointments, a move of dubious legality sure to irritate Carney. When he objected, she simply cut off discussion. She later accused him of sabotaging her proposed candidates. As she explained to the *Mat-Su Valley Frontiersman*, the local paper: " 'It was brilliant maneuvering I had to do to deal with the impasse.' " "And," the same article continued, "the look on Carney's face when she appointed Steve Stoll and Dianne Keller told her the strategy worked, she said."

Within a year, Palin had blown through her personal enemies list. She had demanded the resignation of Emmons, the librarian opposed to censorship (who successfully fought for her job), and Irl Stambaugh, the city's police chief. Among Stambaugh's crimes? Insufficient enthusiasm when Palin asked him to file a weekly report listing "at least two positive examples of work that was started, how we helped the public, how we saved the City money, how we helped the state, how we helped Uncle Sam," according to *The Seattle Times*.

Palin also persuaded allies on the city council to can Dick Deuser, the city attorney. "She wanted yes-or-no answers . . . and he would give her more sophisticated answers," recalls Anne Kilkenny, the local gadfly and author of an anti-Palin e-mail that became nearly ubiquitous after Palin joined the GOP ticket. "She hated it. . . . She'd get very irritated, really irritated."

And Palin took every opportunity to humiliate her former mentor. "She had people coming in, castigating me," Carney recalls. "Anything I proposed, even innocuous resolutions, went down to defeat." At city council meetings, Palin would sit and chitchat with allies at great length while Carney held his hand waiting to speak. Finally, toward the end of the meeting, Palin would turn and ask, "Oh, Nick, did you have something to say? Well, keep it brief."

To this day, Palin's most impressive achievement—the one that vaulted her to the governorship and made her a candidate for vice president—was partly an outgrowth of these same resentments. In 2003, then-Governor Frank Murkowski appointed Palin to be the "public member" on the three-person Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (AOGCC). She resigned from the position eleven months later and, not long after, helped bring to light the ethical problems of a fellow commissioner named Randy Ruedrich.

Ruedrich shared some of Nick Carney's qualities. He was well-educated (he'd come to the commission with a Ph.D. in engineering) and impatient with his intellectual inferiors. (As Palin crammed to get up to speed on energy issues, consuming several books recommended by her staff, Ruedrich seemed to scoff at her credentials.) But, unlike Carney, Ruedrich also violated ethics rules. After several months, it became obvious that Ruedrich was interacting privately with companies the AOGCC regulated. Some of them, such as BP, owed him deferred compensation from earlier employment.

Ruedrich's hauteur created tension with Palin from the get-go. "I got the impression he was surprised he wasn't made chairman instead of her," says Linda Berg, then an AOGCC administrative staffer. (A Ruedrich spokesman denies

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this.) "He was just arrogant. That's the biggest thing I remember." This appears to have exacerbated some of Palin's own insecurities. "She would say she wasn't qualified for the job," her fellow commissioner, Dan Seamount, told me. "I differed with her. She brought a lot."

In addition to serving on the commission, Ruedrich headed the state Republican Party, and he would spend hours each day fielding calls on his cell phone. He also had a habit of bypassing Palin and speaking directly with contacts in Murkowski's orbit. Before long, Palin told Seamount that Ruedrich's private meetings really bothered her and reported them to her supervisors. Though Ruedrich eventually resigned, Palin worried about a possible cover-up. She quit the commission after urging the administration to come clean.

It was a classic even-paranoids-have-enemies case. "[Ruedrich] didn't think she was much of a threat, nothing to be dealt with," says Seamount. Had Palin been a more mellow and forgiving soul, Ruedrich might have been right. But he badly miscalculated.

Although Palin did Alaskans a service by blowing the whistle on Ruedrich, it's not exactly reassuring that a potential vice president is prone to vendettas that will on occasion be justified. One evening, I paid a visit to Anne Kilkenny, who had by this point ascended to local icon status. Kilkenny is a stout woman with a pretty face and a flair for the dramatic. Midway through our conversation, she turned to me and lowered her voice: "What happens to me if Sarah Palin wins?" Kilkenny believes she's on Palin's enemies list, though she concedes she doesn't know for sure what Palin thinks of her.

It's easy to see Kilkenny as Palin's culture-war antithesis. She grew up in San Francisco and holds a degree from Berkeley. She proudly calls herself a social liberal. But Kilkenny isn't so easy to stereotype. Her husband, Pat Johnson, hails from a conservative Wasilla family that's been close to Palin's for decades. Pat's mom Eileen once belonged to a Christian women's group that included Palin's mother—"I used to walk with a limp, but my leg grew two inches after the ladies laid their hands on me," Eileen told me.

Kilkenny initially supported Palin. But, once the mayor bludgeoned the town librarian about book-banning, Kilkenny and a group of concerned residents held a meeting to mull a possible recall. After much debate, they decided to help Palin become a better mayor instead.

The group's efforts reflected a kind of establishment delusion—the hope that if you just surround the rough-hewn outsider with the right advisers and submerge her in the proper environment, she'll eventually assimilate. It's a delusion that's playing out all over again on the McCain campaign, amid all the briefings with the likes of Henry Kissinger and Joe Lieberman. Give Palin a few months in the Old Executive Office Building, the thinking goes, and she'll become Adlai Stevenson. But it never quite works out that way. As Nixon demonstrated, the forces of class resentment can be all-consuming and elemental.

"I remember after the recall meeting how I was going to help her," Kilkenny told me. Palin had a habit of smacking gum during city council meetings. Kilkenny thought more people would take her seriously if she knocked it off. "So at the next council meeting, I sat next to her mom. I said, 'Tell Sarah to ditch the gum.' " And the response? "She didn't take it too well."

Could Sarah Palin despise Anne Kilkenny because Kilkenny once suggested she refrain from chewing gum? I'd like to believe it's not true. But I'm honestly not so sure. ◆

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Invisible Man

How Ralph Ellison explains Barack Obama.

DAVID SAMUELS

On my way to Denver for what is being billed as the political speech of my lifetime, I am doing my best to open up a lotus-like space inside my head in which I can enjoy the pleasurable sensation that comes to lucky Ivy League meritocrats of a certain age, when friends from college and graduate school are on the verge of really running things in America. On any given Sunday, you stand a better-than-even chance of knowing Barack Obama's speechwriters, his economic advisers, the *New York Times* correspondent covering his campaign, or someone who played basketball last Tuesday with the candidate. While I don't know the candidate personally, I feel as if I do, in part because he was at Harvard Law School when I was at Harvard, and he lived a few blocks away from me in a "transitional neighborhood" in Manhattan where rich people brought their dogs to poop. I know where the candidate is coming from, I am thinking, as I watch the fluffy white clouds float by my airplane window in a sea of antidepressant Obama blue.

It is hard not to like the idea of a writer becoming president, even if most writers I know would run for cover when confronted with the collapse of the financial system or the threat of Iranian nukes. I enjoy reading Barack Obama the writer for his particular mix of personal empathy and isolation, his abstract sentimentality and carefully modulated personal bitterness about his father, who appears as much more of a monster than the gauzy title of Obama's first memoir might alone suggest. Open on the gray plastic tray table in front of me is my heavily marked-up first edition of *Dreams from My Father*, which I found in a used bookstore in Manhattan and bought and read with pleasure without the slightest inkling that the author might someday run for public office, and which I am bringing with me to Denver in something of a continuing state of shock that Obama is likely to be elected president. How wonderful and strange it would be if our creaky American empire were to be governed by poets! It is true that Barack Obama isn't Shakespeare or Cervantes, or even John Ashbery, and that most writers would make lousy presidents, especially in America, where literature and politics have learned to keep the other at arm's length. Still, it is hard to argue with the fact that *Dreams* is a terrific book—an insightful, well-written, cunningly organized black male *bildungsroman* that also serves as a kind of autobiographical rejoinder to one of my favorite American novels, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Obama cites *Invisible Man* as a major influence on his personal evolution along with *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, two classic first-person narratives in the African American literary canon that can properly be thought of as novels with strong autobiographical components. (*Malcolm X* is ostensibly based on a series of taped interviews with the ex–Black Muslim leader and was written after Malcolm's death by Alex Haley, who also wrote *Roots*.)

What's even more remarkable about *Dreams from My Father* is the fact that it was written by a man who has since decided to run for president by disowning the most striking parts of his own voice and transforming himself into a blank screen for the fantasy-projection of the electorate. It is hard to overemphasize how utterly remarkable it is that *Dreams* exists at all—not the usual nest of position papers and tape-recorder talk, but a real book by a real writer who has both the inclination and the literary tools to give an indelible account of himself, and who also happens to be running for president. In which connection, it seems right to mention that the Barack Obama who appears in *Dreams*, and, one presumes, in his own continuing interior life, is not a comforting multiracial or post-racial figure like Tiger Woods or Derek Jeter who prefers to be looked at through a kaleidoscope. Though there are many structural parallels between *Dreams* and *Invisible Man*, Obama believes in the old-fashioned, unabashedly romantic, and, in the end, quite weird idea of racial authenticity that Ellison rejected. He embraces his racial identity despite his mixed parentage through a kind of Kierkegaardian leap into blackness, through which he hopes to become a whole, untroubled person.

My own belief is that Barack Obama has the makings of an unusual and unusually effective president, because he might combine a writer's sense of the dramatic moment, and of how language helps to shape reality, with the brain—and perhaps the soul—of a Harvard-educated technocrat. At the same time, I find it hard not to wonder about how President Obama will see the world, and what the major fault lines in his personality might be. The fact that the talking heads and the voters alike are unable to see him plain is an optic effect that Obama anticipates in his first book. It is no accident that the literary model for Obama's narrative of self is Ellison's *Invisible Man*, just as it is no accident that liberals and conservatives alike seem to be talking about five or six wildly different people when they talk about Obama, none of whom bears all that much resemblance to the narrator of *Dreams*.

Dreams from My Father is a story about the consequences of a fiction created by a white mother and well-meaning white grandparents in order to give a fatherless black child a sustaining myth by which to live. It is one of the more interesting facts about Obama the writer that the father he chooses to represent, and whose legacy he chooses to embrace, is a bona fide monster—a scary polygamist who abused his wives and children and drank away his intellectual promise and his career, then crippled himself in a car accident that left him with iron legs, and finally wrapped his car around a tree in a second accident that luckily proved fatal to no one other than himself. *Dreams* is a book about Obama coming to terms with this troubling monster and creating a workable self out of the ruins of his father's life.

Obama's distanced and writerly view of a self as something that is summoned through a creative act of will is at odds with the author's hand-me-down ideas about racial authenticity; the tension between the created self and the given self animates Obama's writing, but is not resolved in any satisfactory way. Filled with striking, well-disciplined sentences and observations, *Dreams* is also shot through with the vanity of a young man trying on borrowed clothing in front of a mirror as he attempts to figure out exactly what kind of black man he will

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be, a process that tells us that the narrator comes from a privileged place in society. The structure loosely but deliberately mirrors the structure of Ellison's novel—a picaresque, which shows an intelligent and bookish young black man's struggle with internal and external definitions of self as he moves through a series of institutional settings and self-defining impulses cloaked in the garb of communal politics or culture: the campus anti-apartheid movement, black and anti-colonialist literature, community organizing, the black church.

Where Obama's narrator provides the reader with a model consciousness, sensitive, responsible, and aware, who moves from triumph to triumph along the road to successfully embracing the fullness of his black identity, Ellison's story ends badly. The Ellisonian collision between the individualist consciousness and the realities of the color line in America produces a kind of fatal and indigestible dark matter that is aware of itself yet can never claim a full share of humanity. Ellison's protagonist is invisible because the symbolic radiance of his black skin queers the efforts of others to relate to him as an individual, and makes him prey to the manipulations of whites and blacks alike who utilize the brutal and absurd dynamics of the color line to satisfy private lusts for power and domination. The tragic thrust of Ellison's novel is often reduced to the banality that black people are invisible to white people. Ellison's deeper point is that the symbolic and actual baggage of race makes it difficult if not impossible for a black man to ever realize his full humanity in the eyes of anyone—white, black, communist, capitalist, or himself. A lone atom aware of his fate but powerless to change it, Ellison's narrator winds up in an underground room in a whites-only building in Manhattan lit up by 1,369 light bulbs powered by stolen electricity, listening to the startlingly original recordings of the young Louis Armstrong—completely illuminated and yet totally invisible.

Obama's decision to identify with the lineage of his black Kenyan father to the exclusion of his white U.S.-born mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, and her parents allows him a measure of release from the cruel racial logic that binds Ellison's narrator—he comes from outside American society, and therefore he is not entirely bound by the overdetermined racial logic that unites the children of slaves and masters. Yet, while Obama's rejection of his "white blood" may seem familiar from the writings of African American authors like Malcolm X, it is actually much stranger; Obama's partial "whiteness" is not the product of an ancient rape by an anonymous slave-master but is instead the color of the mother who raised him. Obama's embrace of authenticity separates him from Ellison's profoundly modernist consciousness, and prevents him from seeing the serial absurdities of his own story. Where *Invisible Man* bubbles with fiery, absurdist humor, the narrator of *Dreams* rarely cracks a smile. One can only imagine what Ellison would have done with Obama's straight-faced account of his futile career as a community organizer in Chicago, or with the incredibly juicy character of Dr. Jeremiah Wright—a religious con man who spread racist and anti-Semitic poison while having an alleged sexual affair with a white church secretary and milking his congregation for millions of dollars and a house in a gated community whose residents are overwhelmingly rich and white.

The fact that Obama is hip to Ellison's rather depressing take on what race might mean for his career in American politics comes through in occasional moments of brutal honesty in his later writing, like his analysis of the basis of his political appeal in *The Audacity of Hope*: "I serve as a blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes project their own views." Here, Obama seems to agree with Ellison about the effect of the racial baggage that people bring to his public performance as a politician. The black candidate is rendered invisible to his white audience, a fact that would appear to leave him with little choice but to use that blindness in a strategic way if he wishes to lead.

It is one of the outstanding ironies of Obama's story that his political rise has been fueled by a tactical grasp of the same racial logic that condemned Ellison's invisible man to living in a basement by himself. The blank screen approach that Obama has embraced works well in a moment dominated by the collapse of Wall Street and the Iraq war, issues for which all possible solutions seem unpalatable; what voters want is to feel that things will change, without too much uncomfortable detail about what will actually happen. The fact that the candidate does not make the usual appeal to the authenticity of his personal story makes the usual attacks on him seem nonsensical, regardless of whether or not they are true, a fact that the Clintons lamented during the primary season and John McCain will find equally frustrating during the general election. Crazy right-wing charges that Obama shares the loonier opinions of Dr. Wright or that he is a secret Muslim blend seamlessly into reports of his calls for immediately beginning the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq or his promise to sit down with the leaders of Iran and North Korea without preconditions, or the fact that he began his political career at Bill Ayers's house in Chicago, or that his financial backer Tony Rezko was a scummy slumlord who paid for the Obamas to have a new backyard. None of it sticks, because Obama is not that kind of candidate. The campaign uses the Ellisonian condition of invisibility to its advantage while also exerting a powerful form of mental jujitsu on guilty white liberals, a species that Obama knows well: Attacks on the candidate are simply projections of the (racist) mentality of his accusers. As they erase the weirder and more specific points of his sensibility in a blizzard of superlatives, whites create an image of a black superman as a kind of photo-negative image of liberal guilt.

On the copy of *Time* that I take with me to Denver, Obama emerges on the cover from some weird murk that makes it look like he was photographed from the head up while naked in a hyperbaric chamber. This being *Time*'s seventh Obama cover in the last year, it seems fair to observe that his face is looking a little fleshier than usual. Whereas he once seemed to channel Denzel Washington playing Malcolm X circa 1963, he now looks more like a man who is tired from the physical ordeal of the campaign. The most striking thing about this week's Obama photograph is his mouth, which is a little bit hard, with upturned corners giving a suggestion of a smile. He's a political Mona Lisa. "He hears America singing—and griping, fretting, seething, conniving, hoping, despairing. He can deliver a pitch-perfect expression of the racial anger of many American blacks," writes David von Drehle, "and, just as smoothly, unpack the racial irritations gnawing at many whites."

Yet, however much the candidate is adored, and no matter how powerful the Democratic Party's mojo seems this year, it is hard to imagine that the Ellisonian premise of black invisibility can survive the premise of a modern presidential campaign, which is that the candidate should make himself known to the voters. Obama's failure thus far to construct a convincing public story about who he is and where he comes from is not an accident, but rather a product of the strategy that won him the Democratic nomination, and which informs his larger take on the realities of race in America. Of course, Barack Obama has already spelled out a convincing story of who he is and where

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he is coming from in *Dreams from My Father*—a story that has real literary merit but does not accord in every place with the usual pieties about race in America. Obama's put-downs of peers with mixed racial backgrounds who define themselves in a more ambivalent way seem at odds with the author's self-proclaimed talent for empathy. "That was the problem with people like Joyce," he writes of a female classmate who was not interested in campus activism. "They talked about the richness of their multicultural heritage and it sounded real good, until you noticed that they avoided black people."

The uniqueness of Obama's campaign rhetoric about race has been identified by seemingly grateful (white) commentators as a profound ability to identify with both races that is assumed to be a product of his mixed racial heritage. The assumption that Obama racially identifies to some strong extent with his white mother and grandparents comes naturally to white people, but it is contradicted by the evidence of his work. A reader conditioned by the dynamics of modernist writing, in which personal identity trumps allegiance to the group, keeps waiting for the author to become equally disenchanted with his black family and emerge at the end as a radically isolated but purified hero, beholden to no one, aware of the larger absurdity of the human condition. But Obama's reading of Ellison tells him that the modernist ending is a trap that should be avoided at all costs. *Dreams from My Father* does not end with the expected discovery that we are all radically alone in the world, but rather with the discovery that he is a member of a strong and loving black African family—even if the father he identified with as a child is a myth created by guilty white liberals. Throughout his narrative, Obama's evolving "blackness" requires a deliberate and increasing degree of mental and physical alienation from the white relatives who cared for him as a child. Frank Davis, the black communist poet who plays Obi Wan Kenobi to Obama's Luke Skywalker, explains to Obama that his grandfather—Davis's friend—is a kind of closet racist, because he is unaware of how much power he wields by virtue of being white: "That's why he can come over here and drink my whiskey and fall asleep in that chair you are sitting in right now. Sleep like a baby. See, that's something I can never do in his house."

What's interesting about the above passage is that Obama quotes Davis's sentiments without a shadow of dissent: The logic of the narrative gives the author permission to show his white family members in a bad light because, as Davis suggests, he is more closely related to other black people than he is to the white-skinned members of his family. Obama's uncharitable treatment of his white family serves the additional function of explaining why his father left. Speaking of his grandfather's love for the black singer Nat King Cole, Obama summons up a scene of his African father coming to dinner at his white family's house, and then turns his gentle, liberal-minded white grandparent into a bigot: "I imagine him asking my father if he can sing, not understanding the mortified look on my mother's face." Did this embarrassing scene actually happen? The language of Obama's book suggests that it did not. The more immediate function of the imagined scene is to distract the reader's attention from a more likely cause of his grandfather's concern—the fact that his 18-year-old mother was being courted by a mature man in his mid-twenties whose family lived in another country.

Yet there is also a catch to this easy black-white dichotomy, namely the fact that the princely African father that Obama imagined as a child was in large part a gift from the same white people whose naïveté the author belittles. Even on her death bed, Obama's mother, Stanley, who joined her son in the task of inventing his father, read draft after draft of his first memoir, helping her son finish the job of destroying the father-image of his childhood and becoming a man—while presumably ignoring the parts of his book that are dismissive of or insulting to her. The price of this kind of psychologically difficult work for both mother and son can only be wondered at.

One of the great themes of *Dreams* is the author's extreme isolation as a child and as a young man and his dislike for the company of other people—a familiar theme in the lives of writers but an unusual element in the biography of an American politician. Living on 94th Street between 1st Avenue and 2nd Avenue while he attends Columbia, Obama describes the student poverty of his surroundings, and explains that "[n]one of this concerned me much, for I didn't get many visitors. I was impatient in those days, busy with work and unrealized plans, and prone to see other people as unnecessary distractions."

The one person with whom he feels a sense of common purpose is an old man who lived next door and seemed to share the author's disposition: "He lived alone, a gaunt, stooped figure who wore a heavy black overcoat and a misshapen fedora on those rare occasions when he left his apartment." One day, the young student returned to find that his neighbor was dead, adding a perfect isolate's touch—$1,000 rolled up and stuffed in the refrigerator. "I felt as if an understanding had been broken between us—as if, in that barren room, the old man was whispering an untold history, telling me things I preferred not to hear." It's a freaky scene, which begs the question of what exactly the author is getting at.

The image of the old man living alone in a room in New York, "whispering an untold history, telling me things I preferred not to hear," carries an unmistakable echo of the high-wattage opening of *Invisible Man*. The Obama at the beginning of *Dreams* is the Invisible Man Jr., a role that the author alternately embraces and resents. He identifies with the lonely old man next door, but makes no effort to befriend him. He wants the old man to stay locked up inside his room. The old man's death is immediately followed in the narrative by a telephone call informing Obama of the death of his father. The fact that these two deaths are so intimately conjoined suggests that the lonely old man is in some ways a psychologically safe version of Obama's own father—a silent, neutered version of the violent, alcoholic, polygamous African man who threatens his son's emerging sense of self. The darkness of his father's actual life stands in sharp contrast to the invented character who was present throughout Obama's childhood and adolescence—a man who was universally liked, brilliant, strong, athletic, a great dancer, who never backed down from a chance to stand up for the universal rights of man; a figure so perfect and yet so troubling in his absence that it is easy to see how the young writer would need to uncover his failings in a public way.

Obama's father, whose lessons about the paramount importance of self-confidence were transmitted to his eager son through the agency of Gramps, in one of the few lines of actual instruction that he ever gives, can also be read in light of another memorable character from Ellison's novel, the black school principal, Dr. Bledsoe, who undermines the young narrator's career and his sense of self and also offers a memorable disquisition on the nature of power: "Power doesn't have to show off. Power is confident, self-assuring, self-starting and self-stopping, self-warming and self-justifying. When you have it you know it." Invisibility, Bledsoe instructs, can be a source and an instrument of power, not just a sign of weakness—a lesson that Obama the politician seems to have taken to heart.

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The character of Dr. Bledsoe also shadows the figure of Jeremiah Wright, who tried his best to destroy his protégé's political career by traveling to Washington and making racially incendiary remarks at the National Press Club just to show that his previous remarks had not been misreported by the press. The fact that Obama can't wrap his mind around the shabbiness of his chosen mentor comes through quite clearly in his soft-minded portrait of the preacher and his relationship with his flock. Contrary to the feverish claims of his right-wing critics, Obama's decades-long attachment to Wright doesn't seem to reveal the candidate's secret belief that the CIA sells crack and spreads AIDS in black communities. Rather, it shows the depths of the author's longing for a suitable father. Obama's susceptibility to an older man who peddles nonsense seems like the product of his need to assume a clear and definite personal identity that will serve as a bulwark against childhood feelings of abandonment and vulnerability—a constellation of traits that eerily seems to mirror the fatal cracks in the personality of our current president, whose own father was largely absent.

The self-sacrifice involved by the Dunhams in raising their grandson is one of the most admirable parts of Obama's story, and there is every sign that Obama is fully aware of how hard his mother and his grandparents worked in order to help him find a place in the world. But in the end, they can't. Ann Dunham was taunted as a nigger-lover at the age of eleven, when she lay on her front lawn in Texas with a black schoolmate—and yet her dark-skinned son is quick to dismiss her as a silly, naïve dreamer, "a lonely witness for secular humanism, a soldier for New Deal, Peace Corps, position-paper liberalism," whose liking for Marcel Camus's film *Black Orpheus* is physically embarrassing and uncomfortable because it uncovers the childlike and sentimental basis of her erotic attraction to black men.

At the same time, his distaste for his mother is also a product of her own belief that there is something superior about identifying with dark-skinned people, and he empathizes with her personal sufferings and loneliness in the way of a sensitive, dutiful son. "She wasn't prepared for the loneliness. It was constant, like a shortness of breath," he says, pointing out in one of the relatively few passages about large-scale world-historical events that, the year before he and his mother arrived, Indonesia had undergone a bloody U.S.-backed coup followed by massacres of up to half a million Indonesian communists. At least part of Obama's rejection of his "whiteness" can be understood in light of the fact that the author was abandoned not only by his father but also by his mother, whose attraction to another dark-skinned man had led her to Indonesia, where she chose to stay by herself after sending her son back to Hawaii.

It is in Indonesia as much as any place else that Obama discovers the global dimensions of the color line. If Obama's narrative is *Invisible Man* with a happy ending, it is important to remember that he defines himself as the son of a Kenyan, and that his actual understanding of race owes as much or more to critics of European colonialism as it does to Ellison or Malcolm X. There is a much-commented-upon scene in *Dreams* in which Obama is sitting in the library of the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia and discovers a photo in *Life* of a black man who burned his skin off trying to become white. Right-wing critics like Jerome Corsi, who adds the honorific "Ph.D." after his name in order to make the contents of his book *Obama Nation* seem less shabby, have denied that any such picture ever appeared in *Life* or any other popular magazine and point out that another picture that Obama describes, of a Japanese woman holding her physically disfigured daughter in a bathtub, which is most likely one of a series of photographs published in *Life* of Japanese children who were damaged by atomic fallout, only appeared in print after Obama moved back to the United States. What this politically motivated nit-picking obscures is the revealing way that colonialist racism and the suffering of dark-skinned people are conjoined in Obama's narrative. The picture of the Japanese woman and her disfigured daughter follows an image of happy French children laughing and playing, and leads directly into the image of the black man whose skin is burned off, and whom Obama initially perceives as a victim of radiation sickness. (The idea that the Hiroshima bomb and murderous anti-black racism were two sides of the same coin is a theme of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright's sermon, "The Audacity of Hope," which Obama describes at length later in *Dreams,* and which would be the title of his second book.) Colonialist powers like France and the United States, the conjunction of these images suggests, destroy the lives of dark-skinned people overseas just as white racism causes black people to destroy themselves at home. "There were thousands of people like him," Obama writes, "black men and women back in America who'd undergone the same treatment in response to advertisements that promised happiness as a white person." Since no such picture ever appeared in *Life*, *Ebony*, or any other major U.S. magazine during the author's sojourn in Indonesia, it seems fair to see Obama's reading of the photograph as a reflection of his own understanding of the impulse to "become white" as a powerful and disfiguring product of a racist white society.

Like the British Empire that turned his grandfather into a house servant, the postwar American empire that the young Obama reads about in Life is guilty of systematically devaluing the humanity of dark-skinned people. At the same time, however, it seems clear that Obama himself sees the exercise of power as a necessary and inevitable part of life. Because Obama does not identify as white, he is free to exercise power without being overly troubled by past sins for which he is not guilty—an attitude that separates him from hair-shirt leftists like Jimmy Carter.

One of the more interesting arguments of *Dreams* is the narrator's suggestion that his dark skin affords him a better shot at understanding power and how to use it. In a scene that owes an obvious debt to Ellison's famous Battle Royal, in which two black boys are made to fight each other in a boxing ring, the narrator is taken out into the backyard of his Indonesian stepfather Lolo Soetoro's small house in Jakarta and is made to put on gloves and fight. "The world was violent, I was learning, unpredictable, and often cruel," he saw. "My grandparents knew nothing about such a world, I decided; there was no point in disturbing them." Emboldened, Obama asks his stepfather if he ever saw anyone killed, and Lolo says yes.

"Why was the man killed? The one you saw?" the young Obama asks.

"Because he was weak," Lolo answers, instructing his half-American, half-Kenyan stepson in the age-old logic of the world outside sunny Hawaii. Obama's version of the scene ends with a searing recognition that the white part of his family lives in a fantasy world in which the need to learn such ugly lessons simply

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does not exist. While Obama's Third World–ism carries with it a certain assumption of American historical guilt, it should not be confused with the cult of victimization that is still popular on college campuses. Obama identifies with his father, Lolo, and other post-colonial men because they are strong. Dark-skinned men can understand power in a way that white men like his grandfather can't. If you are not strong, Lolo continues, "be clever and make peace with someone who is strong. But always better to be strong yourself. Always."

The most outstanding characteristic of the portrait that Obama draws of his white mother, who also serves as a stand-in for white liberal readers of his book, is her hatred for power—a characteristic that her son finds naïve and contemptible. "*Power*. The word fixed in my mother's mind like a curse," Obama wrote, of his mother's response to the inequities of Indonesian society. "Guilt is a luxury that only foreigners can afford," her husband Lolo responds. "Like saying whatever pops into your head." What is notable about this and other passages in *Dreams from My Father* is the extent to which Obama's identifies with the verbal slap and with its speaker, rather than with his mother, a girlish and naïve white American liberal. White Americans like his mother and his grandfather are unsuitable sources for the author's evolving subjectivity because they are blinded by the privileges of their race to the realities of power.

Obama understands the white liberal American distaste for power as a symptom of white privilege, and he is certainly right. Yet it is hard not to be haunted by the feeling that Obama's admiration for dark-skinned strength is the mirror image of his personal feelings of weakness and inauthenticity, and that the personality that he has cobbled together out of the historical experience of other men in other times and places is more of an abstraction than an expression of the fullness of the author's humanity. In part, this abstraction is the product of a biography with too many loose ends to fit comfortably anywhere. With a few tweaks here and there, it is easy to imagine the narrator of *Dreams* as Barack Obama Jr., a rising young American-educated Kenyan politician, or, less likely—but still possible—as Barry Soetoro, a successful Indonesian-American businessman, or as Barry Obama, a mixed-race Hawaiian party boy—each of whom would have had his own identity issues to sort out. Obama the writer may think that he has escaped from his lonely room in Manhattan into the warm embrace of his Kenyan family and his identity as an African American man, but he also has his doubts. His wife, Michelle, worries about him. When he finally journeys to Kenya to meet his father's family, he gets the unvarnished truth from his African relatives about the man who had been presented to him as a paragon of early civil rights–era virtues:

"You know Obama was quite crazy, don't you?" a relative asks. "The drinking made it worse. Did you ever meet him? Obama, I mean?"

"Only once. When I was ten."

"Well, you were lucky then. It probably explains why you're doing so well."

Irregular lines of fresh-faced, sweaty people at least a mile long snake around the chain-link fences that mark the secure perimeter of Invesco Field. As I stand in the afternoon sunlight, I study a Xeroxed pamphlet titled "Common Sense," which is handed to me by one of the sadly diminished number of lunatics who once flocked to political conventions and are now medicated into some semblance of normalcy. "We have developed an 'empire' which, when opposed, has responded with 'economic seduction,' and or 'black ops' violence," writes the author, Thomas P., who claims to have worked as a psychotherapist in the Denver area before giving himself over to his work as a concerned citizen. "As a counselor, when a client inflicts psychological harm on someone I suggest that they apologize, make amends, and move on. Let's do that internationally," he suggests. "That will help to reestablish the trust of our allies and set an example of spiritual values set by the majority of civilized people."

As the pamphlet indicates, the promise of Barack Obama is that of the global emperor who could make it possible for America to speak in its true voice to the world, and move on. Obama knows that America is an empire because he grew up on a colonial island possession as the son of an African man and a woman who exiled herself from her country. The same qualities that make Obama invisible to America make him visible to the rest of the world. He is as much one of them as he is one of us, and they will see themselves in him, and like us better. Yet what kind of president will he be? For all his obvious intellectual superiority over the fitful and impulsive McCain, Obama has impaled himself on the horns of a painful dilemma. While the identity that he constructed for himself in his autobiography has allowed him to blossom as a man and as a politician, it bears little resemblance to the conventional narratives of white men who run for president—and contains elements that are likely to frighten off large portions of the electorate, before or after November 4. The story of a man who identifies with a foreign father, and with people who are not Americans, and who does so on the basis of the color of their skin, flies in the face of the simplistic racial pieties that white Americans have embraced since the end of Jim Crow. The identity that Obama so painstakingly created for himself is not one that he can share with the electorate, and so the price of his political success is that he is forced to sublimate the material he had so painfully excavated and again become invisible. His image-makers create new stories about the candidate, which ring false and drain his marvelous abilities as a writer, a speaker, and a leader.

The police finally show up around 4:30, and, 15 minutes later, I am inside the stadium. The stage set, containing two assemblies of four giant drywall and laminated plywood pillars connected by an arc of smaller pillars topped by a fake Greek frieze, has been an easy target for sniggering Republicans and political reporters all week. From video screens flanking the stage, Obama is telling the crowd, "I will always tell you what I think and where I stand." It's a marriage pitch, but the audience is only half listening, which makes sense considering the fact that half the delegates came here to vote for someone else. After a short break, Stevie Wonder appears on stage and starts talking to himself in that weird, singsong way he has, to organize the voices inside his head. "I love you," Stevie says. "I love you with every song I sing." Stevie is a blessing. He vamps. "Oh, Bar-ack O-ba-ma," Stevie sings, mining the clattering bass-heavy syllables for any unexpected musicality. "I got to do this one. I got to do this one for the future president of the United States and his wife," he says before launching into "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," the Obamas' wedding song. "I know Barack Obama gonna set this country on fire," he sings, flashing his irresistible thousand-watt smile.

Then there's Joe Biden, whose gleaming white dental work is visible from across the stadium. The spark of genius in the choice of Biden was that it gave the portion of the electorate that makes lame foot-in-mouth jokes about "clean" blacks permission to vote for Obama without feeling like they would have to apologize if they met him in a bar. Other than that, the choice of Biden is clearly wrong. What it signifies is that the candidate is unable to run on his own experience of the world, which would require talking

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about his African father and Indonesian stepfather, and what it feels like to be a member of the dark-skinned races who live outside our borders, and make up the overwhelming majority of people on the planet. Because he can't, Obama grabs the talking head from Delaware and clutches him like a security blanket. Joe Biden is one more symptom of the candidate's invisibility, which reads like insecurity. A more confident man would have made Hillary Clinton an offer she couldn't refuse before sending her off on a four-year-long vice presidential fact-finding mission to Azerbaijan.

Biden strides off. A light breeze accompanies pictures of baby Barack. "His childhood was like any other," a voice intones. This is utter bullshit. "But it was his mother who saw in him a promise." On the screen are pictures of the elevated train tracks in Chicago, a big city, where Barack Obama arrived as a community organizer. "I loaded up all my belongings in this raggedy old car, and I drove out to Chicago, didn't know a soul at the time," he explains. The line sounds deeply familiar and deeply weird. It's a line from the biography of every writer arriving in the big metropolis: Langston Hughes, Thomas Wolfe, Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, James Baldwin, Barack Obama…

The camera cuts back and forth from the candidate's white grandparents and his white mother to his strong black wife and gorgeous black daughters, in the promise that we can all be members of one big family. There is dead silence in the stadium. Up on screen, Obama tells the story of sitting on his grandfather's shoulders and waving an American flag at the returning astronauts. At 8:11, he walks down a landing strip of blue carpet to the microphone, a skinny guy in a dark suit hoping to close the sale.

Standing alone in front of 84,000 people, he carries with him the hopes and dreams of his chosen race, of everyone who wants the bad news to stop. He is handsome, fluent, at home in language. He doesn't stumble over ordinary words. His presence up there on the wedding-cake podium, flanked by giant video screens, is proof of how far we have come as a nation. He is the heir to John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Abraham Lincoln. But who is he?

"Our nation is at war, our economy is in turmoil," says the Invisible Man. And then, angrily, "We are a better country than this," which is clearly the best line of the night—scornful, strong, hopeful. He tilts his chin up to look tough and he looks first to his left and then to his right. "We love this country too much to let the next four years look like the last eight," he proclaims. The rest of the speech is warmed-over stuffing without much turkey.

Still, there is something moving about the contrast between the strong, declarative tone he strikes and the fact that he is so young and thin. He is the most intimately familiar candidate for president that I have seen, a man who is clearly on the side of the angels, and walks in the light, and all the rest of that. Plus, he is a serious writer, with a sure sense of his own voice and a professional's ear for hypocrisy and cant that will serve him well in the White House.

But there is something missing, which I fear might be fatal to his presidency. I believe that the painful process of self-formation that Barack Obama went through, and his self-awareness about the process, might be good equipment for a president to have, but watching Obama give the most important speech of his lifetime, if not mine, it is easy to conclude that Ralph Ellison knew what he was talking about. Here he is, Barack Obama, the first black man to be nominated for president by a major party, and he can't speak honestly about who he is and what he believes. He can't or he won't—either way, he's invisible.

Yet, perhaps it doesn't really, truly, matter whether Ralph Ellison was right about the price that Americans pay for having black skin, or whether the personality that Barack Obama created to deal with the pain of abandonment has a few notable cracks in it. The truth is that America is in big trouble, and the so-called national dialogue about race long ago became a collective act of masturbatory narcissism for whites and blacks alike. Barack Obama's father was never a slave; he was a Harvard graduate whose countrymen kicked the British out of their country just like we did.

What we need from Obama is a grown-up commitment to smart ideas that reflect the realities of contemporary society and make it better—as when he calls for lifelong education and for health care and pensions that stay with workers no matter how many times they change jobs, or when he warns that "kids will have to turn off the TV sets and put down the video games and start hitting the books," a phrase that echoes his father's complaints about his son's television-watching during his one and only visit to Hawaii. We need a president with a stereoscopic vision of American power who can propitiate the Russians, cut deals with our creditors, and block the emergence of a nuclear Iran. We need the cool-headed chess player who figured out how to win the Democratic primary despite losing every major state except Illinois to Hillary Clinton. We need a smooth-talking, democratic version of a cranky Third World autocrat like Lee Kwan Yew, who understands the world as it is and who doesn't talk crap. Or else we can continue the way that we are, until America actually becomes a Third World country.

"Say it again."

"Yes, sir."

"That's right."

"We cannot walk alone."

After standing alone for 45 minutes, the writer turned politician is joined by his wife Michelle, as Sasha and Malia skip around in the falling confetti. Malia presents her father with a long blue strip of paper and he winks. She will remember that wink for the rest of her lifetime. The stage explodes, as fireworks go off around the stadium, to what sounds like the music from *Star Wars*.

Yet, apart from his family, Obama is alone. There are no old friends from grade school eager to touch him. There are no senior party leaders. Millions of people admire him, and are moved by the possibility of change and renewal that he represents, but the scene on stage suggests that he has few friends who want to hug him.

"The arc of the moral universe bent a little more towards justice Thursday night," wrote John Aloysius Farrell in *The Denver Post*. "This is the defining moment of my lifetime," Anthony Graves, 32, told the *Rocky Mountain News*. It might be more accurate to say that the fantasy of an escape from history never ceases to pull at America even after we have learned how destructive this fantasy can be. The world didn't turn bad because George Bush made mistakes over the last eight years. The world was always bad. Still, living in darkness is not the American way, because America is always elsewhere. It is a fantasy shared by hundreds of millions if not billions of people around the globe, who want to live in the light. Barack Obama understands both sides of the global equation that makes America possible, but he has decided that he can't speak the truth about who he is and what he has seen and what he knows about the world. Obama is the kind of leader we need, which is why it is a shame that he has decided to remain invisible. ◆

David Samuels is the author of Only Love Can Break Your Heart *and* The Runner: A True Account of the Amazing Lies and Fantastical Adventures of the Ivy League Impostor James Hogue.

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

TRIAD AND TUMULT

Still another extraordinary new American director comes along—the third in just a few months. After Courtney Hunt with *Frozen River* and Chris Eska with *Autumn Evening*, here is Lance Hammer with *Ballast*. Though these three directors have little in common stylistically, all three of their films deal with working-class people.

Hammer's film, which he also wrote and edited, is his first feature. Set in the Mississippi Delta, its three principal characters are black, yet the first person we see is white. He is a man called John who carefully enters the house of a neighbor, Lawrence, because Lawrence hasn't been seen for a bit and John is worried. He finds Lawrence sitting immobile; in the next room his twin brother Darius lies dead—of an overdose, we learn. Lawrence is now sufficiently roused to shoot himself but is only wounded. Taken to a hospital, he recovers.

The rest of the film explains the beginning and moves it forward. The story takes us to Darius's ex-mistress, Marlee; to her twelve-year-old son by him, James; and to Lawrence's involvement with them. Marlee, who is still simmering with anger at Darius's brusque treatment of her, has a menial job, which she loses. James, trying to help his mother, gets tangled for a time with drug dealers. In a shaky juvenile way, he even confronts Lawrence at gunpoint, attempting to get some of Darius's money that he thinks belongs to Marlee. Lawrence calms him. Still, Lawrence feels more and more involved in Darius's responsibility to Marlee and James, and is also himself attracted to Marlee. He offers her a job in his food store, and she accepts. In his slow, taciturn, even gentle way, Lawrence moves toward Marlee, but she rebuffs him. However, at the finish—the film takes place in summer—when James goes off to school, peace among these three seems possible.

The story has more verity than flash. No sliver of artifice or doubt ever intrudes: from the very start we are less viewers than witnesses. (Admittedly, occasional scraps of dialogue could be clearer.) In the press notes for the film—which actually seem to have been written by the man who made the picture—Hammer says he was primarily interested in the atmospheric effect. He realized that "some degree of narrative structure would be required" in order to give form to the work, but his main interest is "the tonal phenomenon." His people are treasured, yet it is the very way that he looks at them, presents them, that is his chief concern. This does not mean showy virtuoso stylistics; but all through *Ballast* we are aware of our sense of accompaniment, moving along with Hammer as he watches and listens.

The physical shape of the film seems at first an oxymoron. *Ballast* is in widescreen format, which is usually reserved for spectacle and lushness; yet the film verges on the visually bleak. The Delta country that we see is gaunt. The wide screen was used, it seems, to set the three principal characters in as much of their environment as possible, to make them inhabitants as well as people—remembering, while respecting them, that they are dots in a cosmos. And the picture was shot in available light, whatever light was naturally present. Strangely, this method, in the camera of Lol Crawley, does not make for *vérité*: it blends the realism with a hint of abstraction. (This effect is heightened by the almost complete absence of music.) Crowning the techniques of the film is Hammer's editing, which is like gentle weaving. As good editing always does, it leads our eyes where we want to look.

BALLAST
Alluvial Film Company

ELITE SQUAD
IFC Films

The temper of the film is so intensely personal that it is little surprise to learn how it was made. Not for the first time in film history, the principals were non-professional. More: the performers made their roles as if they were making their own garments. Hammer's statement needs quoting: "Though a script was created, it was not distributed [to the cast]. Scenario was discussed, then given form, in the course of a two-month rehearsal process. Actors contributed their own language to the rehearsals, dialogue evolved as the result." This method could easily have led nowhere. What is implicit here, beneath the reticence, is Hammer's talent. His choices of the non-actors, his relations with them, his skill at evocation, his pruning, his fixed view of what he was working toward—these were surely the mainstays under those two months.

So each of the three principals appears in a role substantially self-created. JimMyron Ross as James is infused with trembling sincerity. Micheal J. Smith Sr. is Lawrence, a role that is built on degrees of quiet. Lawrence is silent and brooding much of the time, and Hammer has found the depth in Smith that the silence portends. Marlee is the most emotionally demanding role, and Tarra Riggs vitalizes every measure of it. (Smith has since returned to his public service job in Mississippi. Ross is back

ANTHONY RUSSO

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in school. Only Riggs has gone on with acting.) The one prominent white person is the one professional actor, Johnny McPhail, who brushes in some helpful strokes as John.

At the last, *Ballast*, like every outstanding film, is something of a double experience. The drama holds us, yet we are equally taken by Hammer's vision and his ability to fulfill it. What kind of future will he have? We can keep our fingers crossed.

Tightly crossed, if he wants to continue his creative method with his casts. This approach to film-making, taking a non-actor and stripping him to essentials he may not even be aware of, has a long history—a history largely unwritten, as far as I know. (Robert Bresson is the arch-example in the field.) Two of the films discussed here recently, *The Pool* and *August Evening*, used non-actors beautifully—amid professionals. Hammer puts his film almost wholly in the hands of three non-actors who worked out their own roles and found their capabilities. Possibly this recent resurgence of non-professional performance has to do with current worryings about the term "reality"; perhaps it is because of so crass a reason as production budget; perhaps it is a dislike of actorishness. (Bresson once threatened to leave a rehearsal for one of his films if his cast didn't stop acting.) As one who loves acting—even, to some degree, actorishness—and who owes some of his cherished experiences in art to acting, I am awestruck by what can often be achieved with this heterodox approach. Part of this success is obviously possible because film acting can be done in bits, as against sustained performance on stage. But much of it may be because the screen gives each member of the audience an additional eye—the camera.

The slums of Rio de Janeiro are world-infamous, possibly for two reasons. First, Rio is also known for its annual carnival, which winds through the streets ecstatically as it passes the slums. Second, the situation between the police and the criminals in the Rio slums is not the usual struggle between law enforcement and lawbreakers, but nearly outright war.

Elite Squad is thus less a cops-versus-druggers film like its many forebears; it is a battle picture. The screenplay was written by the director José Padilha, Braulio Montovani, and Rodrigo Pimentel. Pimentel was a member of the Rio police for eleven years, five of them in the Special Operations Police Batallion, the "elite squad." This squad, consisting of one hundred specially trained men, is a SWAT team taken even further. (The squad's insignia is a skull.) With Pimentel on board, we can assume that the film is factually reliable.

A captain in that squad, not a grizzled vet but a youngish man, is married and has an expectant wife. His aim, as his voice-over tells us through the action, is to finish his police war and, with his wife and forthcoming son, find another life. The picture takes us through this period in his career. The action consists of raids on drug dealers, gunfights, tortures, corruptions, loyalties, betrayals, revenges. Arrests seem less frequent than killings. The general effect of the police raids on the slums is of hunters invading animal warrens, except that here the animals are armed.

Padilha, experienced in documentary, is here a devotee of the moving camera, frequently hand-held. Obviously he feels that the constant turbulence of the material rules out a lot of static composition or even conventional tracking shots. He also relies on pan swipes from person to person instead of cutting from one face to the other. This swiping suggests not only pressures of the moment but basic quasi-panic and anger. No one is ever surprised by the violence. It is accepted.

Accepted by audiences too. *Elite Squad* was a tremendous hit in Brazil. Of course police action films are often hits in their countries of origin before they succeed elsewhere. But I can't think of any other film of this genre in which the norm is virtual warfare. Brazilians, to whom these conditions could have hardly been news, were evidently fascinated.

And not only Brazilians. The jury of this year's Berlin Film Festival gave the Golden Bear, their first prize, to this modestly competent piece of work. I don't know most of the other films that were in competition—*Ballast* was one!—but clearly the jury was in a sanguinary mood, and the other pictures just didn't measure up. ◆

David Hajdu on Music
GET BACK

As he said about the Maker of All Things in the song he called "God," which was really about himself, John Lennon is a concept by which we measure our pain. Lennon made a great many things both miraculous and ungodly during his foreshortened and intensely public life, and much of what he did brought us grief, in the multiple meanings of the word, or granted us the effect of grief's denial: ecstasy. Lennon and the three mates for whom he served as semi-official leader came to America just in time to provide gleeful relief from our famous post-Kennedy malaise. He proceeded to outrage conservative Christians who were protective of the bigness of Jesus; he vexed aesthetic fundamentalists who were reluctant to accept rock and roll as art; he infuriated rock traditionalists who were even more reluctant to accept the conceptual avant-garde; he irritated Paul fans; he conferred upon us the irrepressibly unpleasant Yoko and released "Whatever Gets You Through the Night"; and then he abandoned us, withdrawing from public life for nearly five years. Finally, through his death at the hands of a crazed fan in 1980, he made us face the darkest potential of the mixed-up, out-of-control feelings of love and fury that he had stirred and refracted with a smirk.

JOHN LENNON: THE LIFE
by Philip Norman
(Ecco)

His admirers and his detractors—there are no others in this case—have been talking and writing fervently about Lennon since the first days of Beatlemania, in Liverpool all those years ago. I do not know exactly how many books have been published about the Beatles, but I own fifty-eight, and I am not a collector by the standards of Beatle fandom. The number of newspaper, magazine, and journal articles about the group and its music is essentially unknowable; the major indexes cite tens of thousands, and those lists exclude fanzines, newsletters, teen mags, and the alternative press, in which much of the most obsessive and revealing documentation of Beatledom has taken place. (The current issue of *Beatlefan*, a magazine now in its thirtieth year of publication, has the first of a two-part interview with Ringo's former fiancée, Nancy Andrews, as well as an illustrated history of "Yellow Submarine" memorabilia.) In 1971, Dick Cavett

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had John and Yoko as guests on his late-night talk show; by way of unnecessary introduction, Cavett described the Beatles as "the most written-about, the most listened-to, and the most imitated" musicians of their time. And now we find published 822 additional pages bound in hard covers as *John Lennon: The Life*, by Philip Norman. To note that Lennon and the band he founded have enduring capacities to ignite the public imagination is to commit an obviousness that is aptly painful.

Norman, a British journalist and author of breezy novels and nonfiction books on pop-culture subjects, is best known for another book about the mop-tops, called *Shout!: The Beatles in Their Generation*, which appeared in 1981. It was notable as a fairly serious, if flawed, attempt to humanize the Beatles and to factor the elements of timing and money into their legend. *Shout!* was good on the convoluted, ultimately catastrophic business end of the Beatles' life, which Norman had once covered as a reporter, and the book was thorough in its treatment of Brian Epstein, the group's deliciously eccentric business manager. (Among the anecdotes that Norman relayed was one about how Epstein, as a boy, would smash a toy rather than share it with other children.)

Shout! luxuriated in the supposition that Epstein had been not-so-secretly in love with Lennon, and it betrayed a parallel in the heart of its own author. (If, for a writer, respectful affection can open windows on a subject, infatuation leads inevitably to closing the shades and turning off the lights.) The first sentence of *Shout!* began: "John Lennon was born on October 9, 1940," and Norman went on to characterize Lennon as "eighty percent" of the Beatles. Throughout *Shout!*, Norman derided Paul McCartney as a cunning square, and he dismissed George Harrison and Ringo Starr as so-so musicians with luck at finding friends. Generous to marginal figures such as Lennon's first bandmates, the drummer Colin Hanton and the bassist Len Garry, who had given Norman interviews for the book (and for its follow-up, the new Lennon biography), Norman smashed the Beatles that he could not have all to himself.

After some forty years covering the Beatles beat, Norman appears to have little enthusiasm left for any of the four—and least of all for the subject of his new book, the former object of his ardor. Like a submissive lover who has been in an inequitable marriage for too long, Norman seems to have had enough of John Lennon. He conducted relatively few new interviews for an ostensibly major work on an important artist of the recent past; he has summoned little in the way of revealing insights into Lennon or his time; and his prose is repetitious and, for the most part, bloodless. Such tepidity is, in this case, not just misguided but also misleading, because John Lennon was many things, but none of them was dull.

Like *Shout!*, Norman's biography of Lennon is nicely detailed on the Beatles' brief apprenticeship in Liverpool and Hamburg, as well as on the much-told story of Beatlemania. Norman is skillful at deciphering the class dynamics among the Beatles—John, the self-proclaimed working-class hero, was raised half a station above Paul, and George and Ringo were of lots considerably below the other two. ("He's a real wacker," Lennon's aunt Mimi said after meeting George, as Norman quotes her.) Norman properly casts the early success of the Beatles in England as not merely a triumph for the lower orders but also as part of a larger collapse of class structures throughout the United Kingdom in the postwar era. Yet like many British writers on the subject of the Beatles, he mistakenly transfers the function of class in the group's rise at home to their success in the United States.

For young Americans, who were scarcely oblivious to class but were attuned instead to a different system of social codes, the Beatles never "read" as lowly. Dressed in their matching Edwardian suits, dolled up with their foppish hair, and chirping in heavy accents of some kind—who in New Jersey knew from Scouse?—the Beatles came across mainly as something English, and that put them, in American minds, a rank above Americans. In our self-conception, all Americans, relative to the English, are real wackers. (This standpoint is of a piece with Americans' beloved, insidious anti-elitism, and with our defensive pride in both our realness and our wackerness.) At the peak of Beatlemania as a cultural craze and licensing bonanza for Brian Epstein, King Features produced a series of Saturday-morning Beatles cartoons, and the voice actor for John gave him a clipped upper-crust accent; I watched the cartoons every weekend in the 1960s, and I never noticed this until recently, when I played some of the cartoons on YouTube for my five-year-old son. When I was a kid, I conceived of the Beatles simply as English and, therefore, more sophisticated than American rock acts. As their work evolved and the Beatles took postwar pop into the realm of art music, I was just one in a country full of rock fans who mistook the Beatles, as Englishmen, for people endowed by birthright for the task.

When Elvis first saw the Beatles, he said they looked like "a bunch of faggots," and their mere Englishness was no doubt feminizing in the eyes of Americans less enlightened than the King of Rock and Roll. Norman shuffles awkwardly around the issue of sexual transgression in the Beatles' early appeal, but he falls considerably short of doing it justice. Beyond the bangs and the falsetto "woo"s and the odd suits, all of which were taken as fey in the early 1960s, the spirit of Eros was palpable in the sight of John

Follow

They took Katie to the tool shed today,
cleaned her of her fingers. The machete
and the flint fire, hands cut and burned

closed. Orange. Purple. The sky
or us healing. Dying.
Heartbeat heartbeat heartbeat. The hay

they use to stitch-up. Keep
our insides inside. She can't
play rugby today, makes a doll

from a can of condensed milk.
Gives it a voice. Something
to follow. A leopard yawning,

an impala collapsing
into calfhood. When she was smaller,
a different school, she watched

The Wizard of Oz with a richman's daughter,
a living room that had brown carpeting
and smelled of limes.

This sort-of rain is coming, thin yarns
spooling from the sky. Katie says
she will climb one with remembered fingers

all the way to green palaces
and hearts that run on batteries.
Tonight, wet, scabbing, she says,

as if in instruction, *Click your heels*
three times, three times, they break.

MATTHEW GAVIN FRANK

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and Paul standing face to face—a bit of stagecraft made possible by McCartney's left-handedness and Lennon's right-handedness—as they sang together into a shared microphone, their lips nearly touching. Among the specialties in the Beatles' youthful repertoire, moreover, were quite a few songs sung by or associated with women—girl-group hits such as the Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman," the Shirelles' "Boys," the Teddy Bears' "To Know Him Is to Love Him" (which John crooned, sometimes without changing the pronouns), and "Till There Was You," the gooey ballad from *The Music Man*, which Paul learned from a Peggy Lee record.

For adolescent boys, then, the Beatles were far more complexly stimulating than traditional male pop stars. And for the girls who dominated the band's hordes of hysterical fans, the Beatles were more than objects of erotic desire. In the meticulous perfection of their public selves, in their sheer prettiness (Ringo excepted, although he had a *jolie laide* quality under the right lighting), and in the magnitude of their popularity, the Beatles surely served many of their young female fans as a fantasy projection, a dream image of teenage girlhood—a group prototype for Hannah Montana, in drag. Beatlemania was, in this sense, an opulent expression of self-love, and that fact alone makes it the official start of the 1960s.

It is forty-five years now since the emergence of the Beatles in 1963—a very long time by the pop-culture clock. How long, exactly? If this were 1963 and I were writing about the singing sensation of forty-five years earlier, I would be talking about Al Jolson. Indeed, in some ways Beatlemania seems as remote as the mania over Jolson, and "Love Me Do" sounds as hokey today as "I'm Sitting on Top of the World."

THERE ARE four thousand holes in *John Lennon: The Life*, and the one in most dire need of fixing is the absence of illuminating discussion of the creative work that makes Lennon matter. Norman, who has done books on Buddy Holly and Elton John, in addition to his writing on the Beatles, is the rare biographer of musicians who has little evident interest in music itself. He concentrates on the events of his subjects' lives with an eye for personal details (John liked to conjure a romantic mood, lighting a candle by the bedside, before sex) but not much of an ear for the songs they devoted those lives to creating. When he does take up a specific work, Norman tends to characterize the song by the style or the quality of its lyrics. Thus he describes "If I Fell," the gorgeous Lennon ballad that the Beatles performed in their first film, *A Hard Day's Night*, tersely as "plaintive." Yes, the words are simple and direct; but the music is luxurious and complex, with harmony parts that purl around the melody. Song after song from record after record goes without much attention, as if John Lennon started a band called the Beatles just so he could imitate a paralyzed person on stage and kick a friend in the head after the show.

In much of what he does on the lyrics, Norman gives way to the same kind of myopia and inclination to inflation that mars a great deal of other writing on the Beatles. In a section on "In My Life," he writes that Lennon "sketched out a song that would use poetic observation in the style of Wordsworth or Tennyson, recalling the Liverpool he had known as a child and lamenting how, even over his short lifetime, that old, solid world of ships and docks had all but vanished." This, for a lovely, truly plaintive song made up of gauzy generalities about "people and things that went before." In a passage on "Norwegian Wood," much the same, Norman asserts that its lyrics "are among very few [song lyrics] that can also be read as poetry or even drama," dismissing in

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a huff the dozens of considerably poetic and dramatic lyrics of pre-rock songwriters such as Lorenz Hart and Yip Harburg, not to mention poetic rockers such as Chuck Berry, Smokey Robinson, and Bob Dylan.

Weighted heavily on the side of Lennon's life before and during his years with the Beatles, Norman's book glances over Lennon's experimental records with Yoko Ono and his post-Beatles rock albums, two of which—*Plastic Ono Band*, Lennon's bleak, unsparing first solo album, and *Double Fantasy*, John and Yoko's joint testament of contentment in what should have been Lennon's mid-life—had as much fine Lennon music as any Beatles albums. Yoko Ono, who submitted to interviews with Norman and encouraged his book when he first proposed it to her five years ago, since reading the manuscript has disavowed it on the grounds that it is "mean to John." I think she has a point. Indifference to the art is an act of profound hostility to the artist. In his deafness to the music that Lennon went to such pains to produce, Norman hurts Lennon's legacy more than Lennon, his art, his politics, or his wife ever hurt anyone. ◆

James Wolcott
THE FATAL HANDJOB

INDIGNATION
By Philip Roth
(Houghton Mifflin, 236 pp., $26)

College students today, showered with condoms and tastefully preserving their drunken, tongue-tapping escapades on Facebook and MySpace for future in-laws and employers, have no appreciation of the sacrifices made by those who came before, the lusty pioneers of the sexual revolution. They take for granted the blowjobs and easy lay-ups made possible through the guerrilla activities of forgotten combatants in the early, undeclared stages of America's war for erotic independence. For such uninformed fun bunnies, Philip Roth's strange new novel may be the perfect back-to-school gift. The protagonist of Roth's latest javelin throw is one such unsung contributor to the eventual overthrow of puritan restraint, an aspiring scholar who earns a minor footnote in the unwritten annals of oral and digital gratification. Roth's designated patsy doesn't actually do that much to light the fuse of the sexual revolution. In fact, he doesn't do anything except lie there in dazed amazement while his date treats him to something special. But every person occupies the solar center of his own story, and although this character's life may not amount to much, it's all he has; or had.

Meet Marcus Messner, the son of a Newark butcher and a portrait of the artist as a young grump. Just as the author's note for *Indignation* presents a partial litany of the many literary honors Roth has received ("He has twice won the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has won the PEN/Faulkner Award three times"), the fruits of unflagging industry and undeviating dedication ("He is the only living American writer to have his work published in a comprehensive, definitive edition by the Library of America. The last of the eight volumes is scheduled for publication in 2013"—eight volumes!), his teenage narrator has his nose pressed so hard to the grindstone that it shoots sparks. In contemporary parlance, Marcus is a grade queen. "Delivering orders and flicking chickens and cleaning butcher blocks and getting A's so as never to disappoint my parents." Disappointed his parents are not. They dote on their boy, beaming like Herschel Bernardi and Shirley Booth in an old Playhouse 90-ish Bronx-naturalism kitchen-sinker. "'You don't know how proud of you he is,' my mother said. 'Everybody who comes into the store—"My son, all A's. Never lets us down. Doesn't even have to look at his books—automatically, A's."'" Pure osmosis!

But when Marcus's father flips out over a stray remark from Mr. Pearlgreen the plumber ("Mark my words, Messner: the world is waiting, it's licking its chops, to take your boy away") and becomes manically overprotective, convinced that his son is hanging out in pool rooms with hoodlums and giving him the third degree whenever he pops through the door, Marcus decides to put major mileage between himself and his worrywart parents, transferring from local Robert Treat College to a small liberal arts college in the farm country of Ohio named Winesburg. Yes, Winesburg, Ohio, the one put on the literary map in all its lonely dolor by Sherwood Anderson, a place where dreams die of deprivation. It's just about the least ideal place imaginable for a high-strung, standoffish Jewish bookworm like Marcus to transplant himself, a poor choice that ignites a chain reaction.

Despite its literary provenance, *Indignation*'s Winesburg owes more to Louis B. Mayer than to Anderson, its campus resembling a Hollywood backdrop "for one of those Technicolor college movie musicals where all the students go around singing and dancing instead of studying." What enticed Marcus into the leafy grove of this letter-sweater operetta? The cover of Winesburg's brochure, which features a pair of Wonder Bread students, boy and girl, strolling radiantly down a grassy hill, the boy dressed in gray flannels, a checked sport shirt, V-neck pullover, and white bucks—an outfit Marcus copies so that he will fit in on campus while remaining inviolably aloof. Despite his Pat Boone get-up (Pat Boone being the prince of white bucks), Marcus has no intention in taking part in snappy production numbers or lending a little intellectual class to the malt shop. He is going to avoid the surface froth and run silent, run deep. He enrolls in a pre-law program, despite having no interest in law. "I hardly knew what a lawyer did. I wanted to get A's, get my sleep."

Following a personal quarantine program, he declines an invitation to join one of the only two fraternities on campus that admit Jews (the others being restricted for "white Christian males"), informing the recruiters that "I'd rather be on my own and study." When his father encourages Marcus to make friends with a fellow Jewish student, a blinding test-tube specimen named Sonny Cottler (who "looked like he'd just finished shooting a scene on the MGM lot opposite Ava Gardner"), he emphasizes what they have in common: "All A's, like you." But Marcus doesn't need or want a study buddy—he can ace it on his own, if only everybody would leave him in peace, which they won't. *Indignation* takes its title from a Chinese war song,

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but it is actually exasperation that feeds the novel's steam engine, and not comic exasperation, either.

Earnestly irritable and irritably earnest, Marcus suggests an aspiring embryo version of Roth's alter ego novelist Nathan Zuckerman, who from his woody retreat in *Exit Ghost* spurns even the company of a cat in his monkish quest to write unmolested into the last of his days. Zuckerman's near-impregnable buffer zone was made possible by years of literary productivity and a wise real-estate investment that allowed him to nourish his artistic integrity stake at Misanthrope Acres, polishing his austerity. Just starting out, short of money, rudely put upon at every turn ("Hey, Jew! Over here!" bark the frat boys at the inn where Marcus schleps pitchers of beer for minimum wage plus tips, and it's a safe guess that anti-Semitic clods tend not to be fancy tippers), Marcus is a martyr to everyone's infringements on his liberty. A special sore point is the college's requirement that all students, regardless of religion, attend chapel at least forty times before graduation. Marcus resents having to submit to this mandatory quota of "biblical hogwash": "I didn't think it fair to have to sit in a Christian church and listen for forty-five or fifty minutes to Dr. Donehower or anyone else preach to me against my will in order for me to qualify for graduation from a secular institution. I objected not because I was an observant Jew but because I was an ardent atheist."

Despite Marcus's attempts to hole up like a hermit and skirt below the radar, his Shelleyan convictions and reclusive habits prick the bat ears of Dean Caudwell, a petty inquisitor with a streak of pious concern you could spread like oleo. "But may I ask, Marcus, merely out of curiosity, how you manage to get by in life—filled as our lives inevitably are with trial and tribulation—lacking religious or spiritual guidance?" To which Marcus replies, "I get straight A's, sir." Again with the straight A's. Too young and naive to comprehend the enforcement mechanisms of conformity that it would take massive servings of naked lunch to subvert, Marcus can't understand why his straight A's don't shield him from the naggings and nudgings of those intent on molding him into a Well-Rounded Individual. "I was a straight-A student—why wasn't that enough for *all* my unsatisfiable elders (by whom I meant two, the dean and my father)?" A page later, "I was a straight-A student. Why wasn't that good enough for everybody?"

Racking up A's across the scoreboard is more than a matter of intellectual pride, bragging rights, overachiever beavering, and fulfilling filial duties ("the sacrifices my family was making to send me away to college made it imperative that I continue to get only A's"). It is also a survival tactic. The year is 1951, the Korean conflict is in full vicious swing, and should Marcus be expelled for low grades or a violation of campus policy, he could "wind up [as] a rifleman in Korea," where the American casualty toll has already topped six figures. So he cracks the books as if a Chinese bayonet is poised at the back of his neck.

Then, one night at the library, that Larkinesque hotbed of girl students quietly going about their business of driving men mad with their pencil-nibbling concentration, Marcus sets eyes on heartbreak waiting to happen. "She was a sophomore transfer student like me, pale and slender, with dark auburn hair and with what seemed to me an aloofly intimidating, self-confident manner." Her name is Olivia Hutton and, unlike most of the moo-cow coeds at Winesburg (who are "either wholesome-looking or homely"), she has passed the heavy-petting stage on the dating scene. On a campus where blue balls afflict the majority of male students, leaving even the hardiest among them bent double or leaning against trees from frustration, Olivia's mouth is an angel of mercy. After a classy dinner at L'Escargot, they take a romantic drive to the edge of the town cemetery and park. Blowjobs being an exotic delicacy in the Midwest of the Eisenhower era (or as the great writer puts it, "blowjobs are at a premium in north-central Ohio"), Marcus is dumbfounded when, after a spirited tango of French kissing, Olivia pearl-dives for his penis in the front seat of his roommate's borrowed LaSalle Touring Sedan, a noble chariot that will later play a fateful role in the novel and become "a monument of sorts, in the history of fellatio's advent onto the Winesburg campus in the second half of the twentieth century."

As a bonus, "an allurement too stupendous for a novice to forswear," Marcus comes in Olivia's mouth instead of a nearby hankie, compounding his dumbfoundedment. Like the guy in the old Irish joke who spends five seconds having sex and the next five minutes racing to the pub to tell his mates, Marcus can't resist releasing a bulletin to his roommate Elwyn upon return, announcing, "She blew me."

> "Uh-huh," Elwyn said without turning his head from the page he was studying.
>
> "I got sucked off."
>
> "Yep," said Elwyn in due time, teasing out the syllable to signal that his attention was going to remain on his work regardless of what I might take it in my head to start going on about.
>
> "I didn't even ask for it," I said. "I wouldn't have dreamed of asking for it. I don't even know her. And she blew me. Did you ever hear of that happening?"
>
> "Nope," replied Elwyn.

He is a man of few words, our Elwyn, a rarity in Roth's fiction, where so many of the characters seem to have major monologues that they have been saving up all their lives to let fly. Marcus's afterglow dissipates like a smoke ring once he begins mentally dissecting the incident. A passive beneficiary of sexual favors, practically a prone bystander ("[I] looked down at the back of her head moving in my lap as if I were watching someone doing it to somebody other than me"), Marcus manages to invite all the Jewish guilt and anxiety that made the 1950s such a Freudian repast through the magic of introspection. "How could such bliss as had befallen me also be such a burden? I who should have been the most satisfied man in all of Winesburg was instead the most bewildered." How could a good girl do something so wanton with such nonchalance? What was going on inside that bobbing head of hers?

When Marcus is set wise by the dashing Sonny Cottler that not only was this not Olivia's maiden dip, but that she has earned the unofficial title of the Blowjob Queen of 1951, he careens between outraged confusion and furious gallantry. "Yes, *there's* the picture of the boy and girl that should adorn the cover of the Winesburg catalogue: me . . . being blown by Olivia and having no idea what to make of it." Both adding and subtracting from Olivia's opaque allure and intensifying his aching befuddlement is the razor scar of a failed suicide attempt across Olivia's wrist, a tragic flaw signifying a cross between Dylan's sad-eyed lady of the lowlands and Sylvia Plath. Olivia is the sex-and-death sundae that Marcus can neither save nor resist. "Was it she who emboldened me, or I who emboldened her, or we two who emboldened each other?" For the answer to this and other exciting questions, stay tuned for the next installment of Love's Throbbing Torment.

After Marcus has an emergency appendectomy, Olivia visits him in his

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hospital room, where he slides back the sheets in raised salute. "Demurely, she lowered her lashes"—who is she, Jennifer Jones?—and wraps her fingers around his upright, calling him "master." Hoo boy. In the flogging frenzy of *Portnoy's Complaint*, where Roth elevated virtuoso fingerwork to a lyric frenzy, establishing himself as the Eric Clapton of literary onanism, Alex Portnoy's hand-cranked penis thrashed and flailed across the page like a miniature firehose, capable of blinding a light bulb at five paces. Marcus's pump handle is less bebop in its output, but equally able at achieving indoor arc and altitude: "She hadn't even really to begin, because I had already ejaculated high in the air, and down over the bedsheets the semen showered, while Olivia recited sweetly, 'I shot an arrow into the air/It fell to earth I knew not where' and just as my nurse walked through the door to take my temperature." Should this nurse in a starched white bonnet report Marcus's gusher to the proper authorities, ratting him out to Dean Caudwell, his career as an A student would slam shut and spell expulsion. "For that one quick stroke of Olivia's hand, my reward would be Korea."

Twice in the novel Marcus reports that his anger and his erection rose in tandem, and the barrel of nearly every hard-on in *Indignation* is loaded with belligerence. The pleasures bestowed by an Olivia pale before the ballistics of young men whacking off with mean gusto, having a point or two they would like to make. Masturbation here is not a make-do substitute for coitus, a tension reliever, a closed-circuit event; it is a form of assault weaponry, a grudge fuck without the fuck, a desecration with a sticky signature attached. Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" becomes the rape of the sock when Marcus's room is ransacked by a former roommate, a homosexual aesthete with the all too flossy name of Bert Flusser, who avenges himself—and how!—over Marcus's smashing of one of his cherished classical phonograph records. "Directly at my feet was a single sock turned inside out. I picked up the sock and held it to my nose. The sock, congealed into a crumpled mass, smelled not of feet but of dried sperm. Everything I then picked up and held to my nose smelled the same. Everything had been steeped in sperm."

Yes, his wardrobe and living quarters have been thoroughly flussed, but this solo invasion is simply a warm-up act for the all-out wank riot that would enter local infamy as "the Great White Panty Raid of Winesburg College." It begins with an innocuous snowball fight during a November blizzard and escalates into a battle royal between packs of rowdies ("There were flecks of red blood in the clean snow from where some of them had been cut by flying debris, which now included textbooks and wastebaskets and pencils and pencil sharpeners and uncapped ink bottles"), mushrooming into a Walpurgisnacht bacchanal with drunken, horny boys storming the Winter Palace of pootie-tang: the women's residence halls. As female students scurry for cover, frat boys answering the call of the wild plunder the dressers and bureaus for white panties, which are sent winging out the window to the quadrangle below, some of them bearing personal greetings: "two freshmen and one sophomore, all of whom were among the first to be expelled the next day . . . masturbated into pairs of stolen panties, masturbated just about as quickly as you could snap your fingers, before each hurled the deflowered panties, wet and fragrant with ejaculate, down into the upraised hands of the jubilant gathering of red-cheeked, snow-capped upperclassmen" The barbarians below craft their own merriment. "A large-breasted snowwoman had been built and bedecked in lingerie, a tampon planted jauntily in her lipsticked mouth like a white cigar, and finished off with a beautiful Easter bonnet arest atop a hairdo contrived from a handful of damp dollar bills."

This outrage against everything decent and prudent brings the president of the college steaming into port like a gunboat. He is President Lentz, a cigar-chomping blowhard nicknamed "the All-Powerful Stogie," who stubs out his burning scorn on the collective forehead of these pathetic excuses for young men—"Is there not one of you who thought to defend the female residents?"—like some self-made big shot in a Sinclair Lewis novel. You horny baboons, he booms, where's your gratitude, your respect, your decency, your honor, your knowledge of current events? "Beyond your dormitories, a world is on fire and you are kindled by underwear." Stogie has no tome for such hijinks. Because where will this "barbaric pursuit of thoughtless fun" end? Imitating the stunted thought processes of the panty bandits and their accomplices, he mocks, " 'Let's go crazy, let's have fun! How about cannibalism next!' "

Well, there'll be no Donner Party reenactments on this campus, not on President Lentz's watch. "Human conduct *can* be regulated, and it *will* be regulated!" He is closing the coffin lid on this chapter of shame. "The insurrection is over. The rebellion is quelled. Beginning tonight, everything and everyone will be put back into its proper place and order restored to Winesburg. And decency restored. And dignity restored. And now you uninhibited he-men may rise and leave my sight." Professor Lentz would have been the perfect role for Charlton Heston in his late prime, a blazing order of ham.

Indignation is the most schematic and set-piecey of Roth's recent novels, a parable of instant karma with an ironic coda that is almost Updikean in its pertness. Early on its theme is voiced by Marcus's father, fear-racked after his conversation with Pearlgreen the plumber that something dire is itching to snare his devoted son. What's this all about, pop? Marcus asks. "It's about life, where the tiniest misstep can have tragic consequences." A couple of hundred pages later, after a tiny misstep has indeed led to tragic misfortune, the father's warning is repeated as a reprimand, a rueful told-you-so. Even more than his words, the father's occupation carves out the novel's central lesson. From the butcher shop in Newark to far-flung battlefields, the world is a slaughterhouse, awash with blood, an endless provider of dead meat. "I persisted with my duties, determined to abide by the butcher-shop lesson learned from my father: slit the ass open and stick your hand up and grab the viscera and pull them out." Even Olivia's suicide attempt contributes a red thread in this inexorable factory outflow of butchery. "Had she been successful, had she expertly completed the job with a single perfect slice of the blade, she would have rendered herself kosher in accordance with rabbinical law. Olivia's telltale scar came from attempting to perform her own ritual slaughter."

Indignation seems a bit bled-out too, a cautionary tale for the already cautious. The penalty meted out to Marcus Messner for not heeding his elders and committing the sin of intellectual pride is so swift and stark that it's as if the sole purpose of the Korean conflict was to punish a guy for getting blown and skipping chapel. The butt of everybody's boring counsel, Marcus learns the hard way the wisdom of such valuable lessons as:

Don't believe everything you see in college brochures.

Listen to your father, even if he is crazy.

Listen to your mother, she only wants what's best.

Beware of strange shiksas bearing blowjobs.

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Never leave your socks lying around where someone might jerk off into them.

Follow the rules, no matter how antiquated and arbitrary, or end up as shish kebab.

Try not to vomit in the dean's office—it leaves a bad impression.

Well, it's all in the execution, and even some of Roth's recent postcards from the abyss bear the entertainment value of a peerless monologist pacing himself before the payoff routine. A former fireballer of speed and velocity whose denunciations and harangues and wicked mimicries mowed down his targets in a hail of exclamation marks, Roth has aged into the classic "crafty lefthander" who now relies on guile, pinpoint accuracy, changes of speed, and pure ornery durability as he glares down from the mound, his storm-cloud eyebrows prophesying rain. But the danger in cutting it fine is that the margin for error shrinks. The slightest loss of control, the least sign of slippage, leaves him exposed, dangling.

Roth's snake-handler's grip showed signs of slackening in his previous novel, *Exit Ghost*, where Zuckerman's tribute to George Plimpton seemed incongruous, an editorial insertion, as did the Andy Rooney-ish indictment of promiscuous public cell-phone use—peripheral topics that felt atonal to the requiem of Zuckerman's final preparations before his fade through the white door. Brief as *Indignation* is, it also contains padding. The debate between Marcus and Dean Caudwell over God and atheism borrows heavily from Bertrand Russell's lecture "Why I Am Not a Christian" (which Roth acknowledges, but why serve up a replay?), and when Marcus's mother visits the hospital while he's recovering from his appendectomy, she asks that he read aloud from one of his school books so that she'll know what he's learning: "Read me something, darling." Opening the first volume of *The Growth of the American Republic*, Marcus begins reading from the chapter about Thomas Jefferson's administration. Mom soon drifts off to sleep, yet Marcus keeps reading aloud until he reaches Harry Truman's tenure. It's a sweet, tender, heartwarming tableau, and frankly I never thought Roth would stoop so low, nor that he would allow his narrator to lilt, "'How terrific,' she said, and captivated me now with a different laugh entirely, a laugh that was laden with the love of life for all its unexpected charms." Of his nemesis, Marcus rues, "Where better than at Winesburg for a Bertram Flusser to luxuriate without abatement in an abundance of rebuke?" It is Flusser who hisses the unhissable: "Then he proceeded toward the door to the hallway, where he turned and hissed, 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you.'" These are not the sort of stainless-steel sentences that made Philip Roth American literature's reigning samurai.

I feel a little cheesy treating *Indignation* with such ingratitude. Roth has given us so much and every novel in his later phase carries the background hum of the novel he is working on at the very moment we are reading this one, accompanied by the awareness that that hum will not go on indefinitely. Each novel, bundled with loss, illness, impotence, unfinished business, unresolved conflict, the scourges of history, and the rough enchantment of Newark in memory's rearview mirror (Roth's childhood Newark becomes less real with each reiteration) is a stay of execution until the last electrical blackout of consciousness, captured most harrowingly in the death notice that ends *Everyman*. In *Indignation*, consciousness survives the fall through death's trapdoor, leaving Marcus suspended in hazy eternity to contemplate and rue what went wrong with his life, cut off from everything except the murmur of his own "perpetual remembering." Well, he always did want to be left alone, and he got his wish. It doesn't get more alone than this. Marcus's everlasting reward is a cruel joke, but then nobody has ever denied that Philip Roth is a cruel joker. ◆

Gordon S. Wood
AMERICAN UNIONS

THE HEMINGSES OF MONTICELLO: AN AMERICAN FAMILY
By Annette Gordon-Reed
(W. W. Norton, 756 pp., $35)

Although Thomas Jefferson spoke out strongly against slavery, he was always pessimistic about actually abolishing the institution. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which appeared in 1785, he declared that the "unfortunate difference of colour" between the black slaves and whites was "a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people." In 1798 Jefferson's protégé and "adoptive son" William Short decided to confront his patron's pessimistic views head on. In a long and remarkable letter, Short outlined what he believed to be the most practical way of ending slavery in the United States. Short had been Jefferson's secretary when Jefferson was minister to France in the 1780s, and he had remained in Europe in various diplomatic capacities. Apparently influenced by his experiences in Spain in the 1790s, the thirty-nine-year-old Short had concluded that intermixture between whites and blacks offered the best solution to America's racial predicament—a solution that may be as meaningful today as it was two hundred years ago.

Short knew, of course, about America's "deep rooted prejudices," and he was aware of Jefferson's "great aversion" to miscegenation between whites and blacks. Consequently, the young diplomat approached the idea of racial mixing with great care, realizing, as he said, that some of "the most enlightened & virtuous minds" believed it to be an "evil." Still, Short asked, was not "the mixture of the two colors" a much lesser evil "than keeping 700,000 people & their descendants in perpetual slavery"? And he continued: "Even admitting that this mixture should change our hue & that all our Southern inhabitants should advance to the middle ground between their present color & the black . . . still they would not be of a darker color than the inhabitants of some of the provinces of Spain." And these slightly darker Spaniards suffer no "inconvenience" from other Spaniards or from the rest of Europe "merely on account of their color."

Even in America, Short told Jefferson, there were "some people darker, than the gradual mixture of the blacks can ever make us," and they experienced no prejudice. In fact, he maintained, there were dark-complexioned women in America who were quite attractive. He gave as an example Frances Bland Randolph Tucker, mother of John Randolph of Roanoke and wife of St. George Tucker. "There is no country that might not be content to have its women like her," he said. Short concluded by claiming that those who were the products of a black and white mixture could be as inspiringly beautiful

Gordon S. Wood's most recent book is The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History *(Penguin Press).*

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as "those who can boast the perfect mixture of the rose & and the lilly."

Jefferson never acknowledged what Annette Gordon-Reed rightly calls "this utterly astounding" letter, even though Short twice asked him for a response. The reason is not far to seek. For Jefferson, Short's idea of racial mixing and the beauty of dark-complexioned people cut too close to home. Shortly before receiving this letter, Jefferson's mulatto concubine, Sally Hemings, had given birth to a baby whom Gordon-Reed and most historians now believe to be Jefferson's son, Beverley Hemings. Of course Jefferson could never openly recognize his son. Neither could he publicly acknowledge his relationship with Sally Hemings, nor could he publicly regard what he called racial "amalgamation" as anything other than "a degradation." Why this should have been so is only one of the many questions that Gordon-Reed attempts to answer in this very important and powerfully argued history of the Hemings family.

Although Gordon-Reed was trained as a lawyer, she has the imagination and the talent of an expert historian. In addition to being a professor of law at New York Law School, she has also become a professor of history at Rutgers University. And with this book Gordon-Reed explores Jefferson's relationship to Sally Hemings and the rest of his household slaves with a degree of detail and intimacy never before achieved. If anyone had any doubts about whether Sally Hemings was Jefferson's concubine, *The Hemingses of Monticello* should put them to rest.

In 1998, *Nature* magazine published a brief article reporting on DNA tests that strongly suggested that Jefferson was the father of the last son of his slave Sally Hemings. Although the general public was excited by this finding, many historians thought it simply confirmed a relationship that they had already come to accept—largely owing to a book that Gordon-Reed published a year earlier, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*. In that work, Gordon-Reed had devastatingly criticized the manner in which professional historians had treated the possibility of a Jefferson-Hemings liaison. She approached the controversy as a lawyer investigating how historians analyzed and used evidence and conceived of proof. Out of white pride or hero worship, she concluded, the Jefferson scholars had mishandled or ignored evidence of a relationship between Jefferson and his female slave, and had demanded a burden of proof that was impossible to attain. Above all, they had played down the extent of racial mixing that existed in the country and had ignored black testimony. Why, Gordon-Reed asked, should historians have dismissed out of hand Madison Hemings's claim that Jefferson was his father?

There is also, of course, the long oral tradition of the black heirs of Thomas Woodson claiming that their ancestor was actually the first of Hemings's children—a claim that, unfortunately for the Woodson heirs, the DNA finding does not substantiate. The best that Gordon-Reed can do with this embarrassing Woodson problem is to say that "it seems clear that the Woodson family is connected to the Hemingses," with "the only question that remains" being "exactly what that connection is."

In her new book Gordon-Reed has not abandoned her incisive legal approach to evidence, but here she has essentially become a historian, and a superb one. She has set out to do what she thinks professional historians should have been doing all along. With great historical imagination, she has done far more than put together a convincing case for the Jefferson-Hemings relationship. She has also reconstructed the complicated and intimate relations between black and white families in Jefferson's household over several generations. And perhaps most important, she has uncovered the many expressions of humanity by both blacks and whites existing within a fundamentally inhumane institution.

Gordon-Reed's long, dense, and fascinating volume makes abundantly clear that there was no single slave experience in the Virginia of the early republic. "Tempting and romantic as it may be to construct a monolithic population of slaves who acted cohesively across color and genetic lines because of their common enslaved status," she writes, "it is more realistic to accept that different individuals and families had different understandings about where they stood in relation to other slaves, within the slave system, and, indeed, within America's racial hierarchy." The mixed world of the Jefferson-Hemings families "shows the problem with seeing slavery through the eyes of twentieth-century residential Jim Crow."

Indeed, suggests Gordon-Reed, there may even be a lesson for our own time from all this racial mixing that has created various distinctions among blacks. "There has been a tendency throughout American history, and into the present day," she remarks, "to see black people as symbols or representations rather than as individual human beings." Whites have too often assumed that "the concept of individual as opposed to group identity is meaningless for blacks." Although blacks themselves have contributed to that assumption of group identity, her book shows how wrong that assumption is. She wisely insists that "there was not then, as there is not now, one way to be black."

History, according to Gordon-Reed, "is to a great degree an imaginative enterprise." And since the evidence of the Hemingses and the other slaves in Jefferson's Monticello is so sparse and fragmentary (Jefferson scarcely ever mentions Sally Hemings in his extant papers), Gordon-Reed needed a lot of imagination to write this book. Conceding that "there is something strange" about Sally Hemings's "near-invisibility in Jefferson family exchanges," she has had to rely a great deal on conjecture and "reasonable inferences"—and on what she refers to as "connect the dots." At times Gordon-Reed's effort reminds one of Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, putting together "out of the ragtag and bob-ends of old tales and talking" a story of shadows that seemed more imagined than real.

Despite all these difficulties, Gordon-Reed's account of the Hemingses at Monticello is persuasive. And it turns out that there exists much more evidence for her to work with than one might initially assume—or we might better say that she has uncovered much more evidence than other historians have been able to uncover. Although Gordon-Reed concedes that we know very little about Sally Hemings and her attitudes about her life as a slave, we do know quite a bit about the lives and attitudes of the other Hemingses, and we can use that knowledge to help us to understand Jefferson's relation to his young concubine. Gordon-Reed exploits that knowledge beautifully. By mastering a multitude of inter-related facts and coincidences, and by putting together and explaining dozens of complicated Jefferson-Hemings family relationships, black and white, she has indeed connected a multitude of dots, and thereby answered the many doubts some historians have had that Jefferson could have been sexually involved with his mulatto slave.

To answer these doubts, Gordon-Reed has occasionally had to rely on some exceedingly ahistorical generalizations about the ways all people behave regard-

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less of time or circumstance. Although she is well aware of "the danger of 'essentializing' when making statements about people of the past—positing an elemental human nature that can be discerned and relied upon at all times and in all places," she nonetheless believes that there are "some elements of the human condition that have existed forever, transcending time and place." If there were no such common elements, she correctly contends, historical reconstruction would be impossible. So in order to explain how Jefferson might have become attracted to the beautiful mulatto teenage slave who was sharing his residence in the Hôtel de Langeac in Paris, she begins by assuming that "males and females, even of different rank and race, engage in light banter that acknowledges the other's gender. That is one of the ways relationships—licit and illicit—are formed." So, too, in order to explain why Hemings might have felt some degree of equality with her master, Gordon-Reed posits that "oppressed peoples do not always internalize the stories that their oppressors tell about them."

In Paris, Jefferson occasionally bought clothes for Hemings, and this, says Gordon-Reed, has important implications, because of the way males generally relate to females: "When a male buys clothes for a female who is not his daughter or wife, it almost immediately raises the intimacy level between him and the female recipient of his gifts, in ways that can make it much more difficult for the two to keep a safe emotional distance from each other." In order to explain why the Jefferson and Hemings families kept quiet and "closed ranks" in the face of the newspaper revelations of Jefferson's relationship with his mulatto slave in 1802, Gordon-Reed resorts to the generalization that "one of the great strengths (and great weaknesses) of the institution of the family is that family members protect or, depending upon the situation, cover for one another."

Most of Gordon-Reed's assumptions about human nature are commonsensical and not jarring, though her repeated reliance on them does occasionally make one uneasy. Still, she has more than her generalizations about human nature to make her case for the complicated relationship between the Jefferson and Hemings families. She begins by describing the prevalence of mulattos in late eighteenth-century Virginia and the complicated inter-relations among the leading planter families. No one among these families was more important to Jefferson than his father-in-law, John Wayles. Wayles was a self-made man who, in 1746, married Martha Eppes; she died two years later after giving birth to a daughter also named Martha (Jefferson's future wife). After marrying and burying two more wives, Wayles took up with one of his slaves, a mulatto named Elizabeth (Betty) Hemings, and with her he fathered six children, including Sally Hemings, who was born in 1773. By later Virginia law, Sally was a "quadroon," one-quarter black.

In 1772, Martha Wayles Skelton, a widow, married Thomas Jefferson, and when her father died in 1773, the Hemings family of slaves passed to Jefferson and his wife. Martha Jefferson gave birth to six children, only two of whom survived into adulthood, Martha (Patsy) and Mary (Polly or Maria). In 1782, Jefferson's wife died, leaving her thirty-nine-year-old husband inconsolable. According to a contemporary, he promised his wife on her deathbed that he would never marry again—a remarkable pledge, since most eighteenth-century widowers quickly remarried.

In 1784, Jefferson went to Paris to engage in trade negotiations with the European states, and a year later the Continental Congress appointed him minister to France to succeed Benjamin Franklin. Accompanying him to Europe were his eldest daughter Martha and his nineteen-year-old slave James Hemings, the brother of Sally, who was to be trained to be a chef for Jefferson's household in Paris and for Monticello upon their return to America. When Jefferson learned of the death of his two-year-old daughter Lucy in Virginia, he determined to have Polly, his other remaining daughter, join him in France. In 1787, after many exchanges of letters back and forth across the Atlantic, the nine-year-old Polly was finally able to sail for Europe. She was accompanied by her fourteen-year-old maid, Sally Hemings. According to Abigail Adams, who met the pair in London, Sally was "still a child" and was "wholy incapable of looking properly after" Polly. Indeed, Mrs. Adams told Jefferson, the ship captain who brought the pair over thought that Polly's maid would be of "so little Service that he had better carry her back with him."

These comments have led some to believe that such a childlike Sally could never have become Jefferson's concubine while in Paris: she was, after all, thirty years younger than Jefferson. But Gordon-Reed mounts a very convincing argument for the eventual relationship. Although Abigail may have thought Sally was too young and immature to be Polly's maid, she did think Sally was older ("a Girl about fifteen or sixteen") than she was in fact. Sally was unusually attractive, with a sweet temperament, and was, according to the testimony of another slave, "mighty near white," with "straight hair down her back." Gordon-Reed even suggests that the captain's offer to take Sally back to America may have been based on the young girl's beauty. He was "just a little too eager," and may have had designs on her—a suggestion that seems unfounded, and one of the few instances when Gordon-Reed pushes her conjectures beyond the limits of persuasiveness.

Gordon-Reed shows that the age difference between Jefferson and Hemings was no barrier to a relationship, demonstrating just how common and acceptable marriages between older males and teenage brides were in eighteenth-century Virginia. Jefferson's father was in his early thirties when he married his wife of nineteen. Thomas Mann Randolph married, at age fifty, seventeen-year-old Gabriella Harvie. Thirty-two-year-old James Madison's first engagement was with fifteen-year-old Kitty Floyd; and although the engagement eventually collapsed when Miss Floyd found someone else, no one thought it was a strange or unusual match. Jefferson's attraction to Sally may have been helped by the fact that she was the half-sister of his deceased wife, which Jefferson knew. She may even have resembled Jefferson's wife. And it is indeed hard to believe that the relatively young Jefferson, who called sex "the strongest of all the human passions," could have remained celibate the rest of his life.

In her reconstruction of life with the Hemings siblings in Jefferson's residence at the Hôtel de Langeac, Gordon-Reed is at her imaginative best. French law had no place for slavery, and the Hemings siblings knew that they could gain their freedom in France. Jefferson knew this, too—and consequently he treated both James and Sally in a special manner. Gordon-Reed contends that the lives of Sally and James Hemings were transformed by their experience in France: "These two young people saw more of the world and experienced more of what was in it than the vast majority of their countrymen, white or black, who during that time lived and died without venturing far beyond the confines of the isolated farms where they were born."

They learned French, and they were often on their own in Paris earning their own money, paid to them by Jefferson. Indeed, Jefferson spent a good deal of money on Sally's clothing—not as much, of course, as on his daughters' clothing,

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"but enough to make a definite change in Hemings's self-image and her day-to-day existence," remarks Gordon-Reed. With Polly away at school and French servants running the household, Sally, in Gordon-Reed's account, "was essentially cast as an observer, watching what other people did to make things run smoothly." Of course, she helped out in the household, aiding her brother in preparing meals or running errands for him. And she had particular skill as a seamstress—a skill that Jefferson believed was one of the foundations of a woman's domestic life, even better for women than reading.

Their Paris experience was bound to make both Hemingses think of themselves in a different way—not as typical Virginia slaves, but as hired servants with special roles in the household. In fact, Jefferson and the two Hemingses would have had more interesting things to say to one another in Paris than they ever would back at Monticello. For some French friends of Patsy, Sally may not have even seemed to be a servant. One referred to Sally as "Mademoiselle Sally," a title that no normal servant would have been given. Before long Sally was given a regular salary and began acting as a chambermaid to Jefferson, a role that she would continue to play at Monticello upon returning to America. It is not surprising that both she and her brother would come to think of themselves as free persons with dreams about the future that few slaves back in Virginia could ever have. And it is not surprising that during that time in France, as Sally's son Madison Hemings recalled, "my mother became Mr. Jefferson's concubine."

We will never know what the relationship was really like, since neither Jefferson nor Hemings talked about it. But in the absence of words, Gordon-Reed uses Jefferson's actions, his relations with Sally's male relatives, and the experience of other planters with concubines to tease out what it might have been. That the master of Monticello showed special affection toward some of his slaves suggests that his relation with Sally was consensual, and it may even have involved a degree of love. Occasionally, though, Gordon-Reed lets her imagination get out of hand. She suggests that many of the white women whom Jefferson met in France might have been too formidable, too unfeminine for him: "What a contrast Sally Hemings must have presented! When he came home to the Hôtel de Langeac after spending time with the Cosways, Churches, and Madam de Tessés of that world, there he would find his wife's half-sister, the extremely attractive, sweet-natured, sewing, Virginia farm girl. She was the very opposite of frightening."

Gordon-Reed finds instructive the example of Jefferson's slave Mary Hemings, Sally's oldest sibling. In the 1780s Mary was hired out to a prosperous Virginia merchant named Thomas Bell, with whom she began a relationship that produced two children. Not long after Jefferson returned from Paris, Mary asked him to sell her to Bell, which he did, and the mixed-race couple, though not legally married, lived together openly for the rest of their lives. This was not a Jim Crow era, and no one-drop rule for the determination of blackness was yet in effect. Despite living with a black concubine, Bell held the office of justice of the peace and was appointed to important community committees in Charlottesville. Throughout this period he remained one of Jefferson's closest friends. They exchanged visits in each other's homes and "talked of quotidian things," Gordon-Reed imagines, "including, no doubt, the ways—good and bad—of the sisters with whom each was living."

Despite the gross inequalities of power between masters and slaves, Gordon-Reed suggests with this example and others that some slaves could occasionally have some control over their lives. In other words, "slavery was not just one, enormous act of oppression against a nameless, interchangeable mass of people." It involved millions of acts of oppression through several centuries against which individual human beings used whatever means available to them to assert their humanity. All the Hemingses of Monticello did just that: they asserted their humanity. "Members of [Sally] Hemings's family, free and enslaved, sometimes responded to Jefferson in ways that suggest they thought of him as more a version of an in-law than the rapist of their family member."

When Jefferson planned his return to America in 1789, he was confronted with problems. Sally Hemings was pregnant, and she did not want to go back to Virginia. According to her son Madison, in order to induce his mother to return, Jefferson "promised her extraordinary privileges and made a solemn pledge that her children should be freed at age twenty-one years." At the same time, James Hemings told Jefferson of his desire to remain in France and to live off his newly acquired skill as a chef. To persuade him to return, Jefferson presumably promised him his freedom as soon as he trained another slave to cook in the French style.

After Jefferson returned to America and assumed his office of secretary of state in the Washington administration, his Hemings family began to break up. Mary was sold to Bell. Elizabeth Hemings's eldest son, Martin, demanded to be sold, and, according to a Jefferson letter, was "disposed of" along with a "chariot," both sold as pieces of property. James and Robert, who had been moving about and living rather freely, were formally emancipated by Jefferson. Yet Sally Hemings remained at Monticello, with, according to one witness, "a room of her own" within the house. She eventually gave birth to six or perhaps seven children, four of whom lived to adulthood. Two of them, Beverley and Harriet, left Monticello for freedom in 1822, and the other two, Madison and Eston, were freed by Jefferson's will, along with three other Hemingses. Jefferson kept his bargain with Sally. As octoroons, or one-eighth black, their children were legally white by Virginia law in the 1820s. Of the four, only Madison chose to remain in the black community.

The major problem that Gordon-Reed faced in dealing with the Jefferson–Sally Hemings relationship is explaining why there is so little record of it. Jefferson seems to have been scrupulous in trying to avoid mentioning Sally in any of his writings. He never acknowledged his slave children, publicly or privately; he simply noted their births in his Farm Book, along with the new colts that he acquired and the hogs that he killed. Even Madison Hemings admitted that although Jefferson "was affectionate toward his white grandchildren," he "was not in the habit of showing partiality or fatherly affection to us [Hemings] children." And because Jefferson's grandchildren, and not Jefferson himself, taught Madison how to read and write, Jefferson presumably took little interest in their education. Although Gordon-Reed tries to play down Madison's criticism of his father, in the end she concedes that Jefferson could never truly see Madison and his other slave children "as human beings separate from him and his own needs, desires, and fears."

Other Virginia leaders—such as George Wythe, Jefferson's friend and law teacher—were not quite so cool and secretive in dealing with their mixed-race offspring. But Jefferson and his white family thought that the third president was special, and that he had a special American legacy to protect. When his many political enemies began refer-

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ring to "Dusky Sally" and to all the little Toms running around Monticello, Jefferson and his white family reacted by closing ranks. Since Sally had become "the most well known enslaved person in America," the family felt that they had to establish a vast cover-up of the relationship, even to the point of perhaps culling Jefferson's writings of all references to Sally and planting false leads—as Jefferson's granddaughter, Ellen Randolph Coolidge, did in 1858 by writing a letter to her husband naming her uncle Samuel Carr as the father of the Hemings children. Another grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, named Peter Carr as the father. According to the DNA findings, neither of these Carr nephews of Jefferson could have been the father.

By setting the Jefferson–Sally Hemings liaison in historical context, by placing it within a complicated web of family and white-slave relationships at Monticello, Gordon-Reed has disclosed what Jefferson and his white family tried to hide. But she has done more. She has thrown an extraordinary amount of light on what she calls "the shadow world of slavery," and has revealed a complex reality of white-black relations that one does not usually find in history books. Although Gordon-Reed defends Jefferson in many places in her story and humanizes both him and many other individuals, both white and black, she certainly does not lose sight of the essential horror of slavery.

Near the end of her book she quotes a chilling letter in which Jefferson's granddaughter Ellen Coolidge reflects upon the consequences of the death of her black nurse, Critta Colbert, one of the Hemingses. The thirty-six-year-old Colbert left four young daughters and a grief-stricken husband, and all Coolidge can do is ponder which of the enslaved daughters she might claim and which might go to her sisters, "as if," writes Gordon-Reed, "they were puppies being picked from a litter." What is most disturbing about the letter is that Ellen Coolidge was considered by herself and others to be a kind and generous slave owner. ◆

Cass R. Sunstein
MISERY AND COMPANY

LEADERLESS JIHAD: TERROR NETWORKS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
By Marc Sageman
(University of Pennsylvania Press, 208 pp., $24.95)

A few years ago, Daniel Kahneman, David Schkade, and I were involved in several studies of punitive damage awards by juries. We began by asking one thousand or so demographically diverse people to register their judgments about misconduct by various wrongdoers. We asked them to rate their moral outrage on a scale of zero to six, where zero meant "not at all outrageous" and six meant "exceptionally outrageous." We also asked them to come up with an appropriate dollar award.

To study their answers, we used a simple technique, in which individual responses are pooled to produce "statistical juries," whose verdict is the judgment of the median member. Having done this, we found that small groups of six people, or statistical juries, will agree about outrageousness and appropriate punishment on the scale of zero to six. If one group says that the conduct deserves a five, other groups are highly likely to agree. By contrast, statistical juries show a high degree of variability with respect to dollar awards. The dollar judgment of one jury is not a good predictor of the dollar judgment of other juries.

This study suffered from a serious problem: it did not involve group deliberation. If the goal is to understand how juries really behave—or more ambitiously, how outrage develops in the real world—this is a major defect. To remedy it, we conducted a follow-up study, involving about three thousand jury-eligible citizens and five hundred deliberating juries, each consisting of six people. Here is how the experiment worked. Every juror read about a personal injury case, including the arguments made by both sides. Jurors were also asked to record, in advance of deliberation, their individual judgments on a bounded numerical scale, and also in terms of dollars. Next they were asked to deliberate together to reach a verdict, both on the bounded scale and on the dollar scale. Our goal was to discover the relationship between people's individual judgments, in advance of deliberation, and the ultimate views and actions of group members who have discussed the matter.

You might predict (as I did) that deliberation would lead to compromise, and hence that the verdicts of juries would be pretty close to the median of punishment judgments of jurors; but your prediction would be badly wrong. It turned out that the effect of deliberation was to create a "severity shift." When people began with a lot of outrage, their interactions made them significantly more outraged than they were before they started to talk. And with dollar awards, the severity shift was especially large. The ultimate award of juries was usually higher than the award favored by the median juror in advance of deliberation. In many cases, the jury ended up with an award at least as high as the highest award favored, in advance, by any of the jury's members.

We may draw two conclusions from these studies. First, judgments about appropriate punishment, and the right response to bad acts, are rooted in moral outrage. Second, social interactions greatly increase outrage and people's desire to punish in response to it. If like-minded people share a degree of outrage and get together with one another, they are likely to move in extreme directions.

When juries impose high punishments, they are hardly engaged in acts of violence. But violent behavior, including terrorism, often seems to be a product of social interactions. We might even hypothesize that it is different in degree, but not really in kind, from the crimes involved in the punitive damage experiments. Is the hypothesis correct? When people shift from feeling moral outrage to committing outrageous acts, are group dynamics the key factor? A resoundingly affirmative answer is the central theme of Marc Sageman's fascinating effort to understand the emerging nature of Islamic terrorism.

Sageman is a forensic and clinical psychiatrist who has been studying terrorism for a number of years. Once employed by the Central Intelligence Agency and now a counterterrorism consultant with the United States government, he is especially interested in Islamic terrorism. Calling for "evidence-based terrorism research," he rejects the approach of those who invoke case histories to examine particular terrorists. He believes that such an approach is insufficiently scientific. Focusing on individuals "can never tell us how they are different from those who might have become terrorists but did not." Nor is Sageman enthusiastic about efforts to explore the causes of terrorism by investigating economic and social conditions. In his view, such

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purportedly causal explanations fail to come to terms with a crucial fact: the rate of terrorism varies dramatically even when social conditions remain constant. In certain nations, campaigns of violence begin slowly, spike rapidly, and then fade abruptly. Sageman believes that this observed pattern "cannot be explained through slow-moving societal forces and cultural templates."

Sageman prefers what he calls a middle-range analysis—one that is genuinely scientific, in the sense that it is based on evidence rather than anecdotes or speculation, and that uses statistical techniques to learn how people "evolve into terrorists; how they interact with others (terrorists and non-terrorists); how they become motivated to commit their atrocities; how they are influenced by ideas; and how they follow orders from far-away leaders." To answer these questions, he used a number of public and private sources to compile a large database, now including more than five hundred Islamic terrorists and their various characteristics. Sageman typically proceeds by collecting trial transcripts, legal documents, notes on testimony, and published interviews with Islamic terrorists. (He acknowledges that Islamic terrorism has distinctive features and he does not purport to have studied terrorism in general.) He favors the "application of the scientific method to terrorism research."

Drawing on the data, Sageman offers an arresting conclusion, which is that a major explanation of Islamic terrorism lies in patterns of social interaction that transform moral outrage into extremism. In his account, terrorists are not mentally ill, poor, uneducated, sociopathic, or victims of trauma. In the main, they are ordinary individuals who move to radical positions as a result of discussions with like-minded others. Sageman focuses in particular on the rise of what he calls "global Islamist terrorism"—a large and loosely organized social movement that is subject to no command-and-control structure and has prospered in the wake of the invasion of Iraq. What makes Sageman's account distinctive is his emphasis on the crucial role of social networks—in the real world and on the Internet—and his effort to show that an understanding of those networks has significant and sometimes counterintuitive implications for how to safeguard national security. At the same time, Sageman offers general lessons about how enclosed enclaves of like-minded types help produce political beliefs and action of many kinds, including violence.

Like many other observers, Sageman begins by noting that a sharp distinction must be made between Al Qaeda as a formal organization and Al Qaeda as a social movement. Before September 11, Al Qaeda was synonymous with what Sageman calls Al Qaeda Central, the organization founded two decades ago by Osama bin Laden, whose followers formally swore loyalty to him or to his designated subordinates. In the 1980s and 1990s, many terrorist acts were coordinated by bin Laden and his deputies. But after the aggressive American response to the attacks of 2001, Al Qaeda Central has receded in power and importance. What has arisen is a social movement in the form of "informal networks that mobilize people to resort to terrorism," amounting to the "leaderless jihad." Sageman argues that as an organization, Al Qaeda, though still a threat, is largely contained—but the social movement has grown significantly. That movement is greatly focused on the redress of what it perceives as past and present grievances, on justice, and on the restoration of past virtue and glory.

The heart of Sageman's analysis draws lessons from his database. Many observers believe that poverty is responsible for terrorism, but Sageman finds no evidence to support this belief. On the contrary, most of the terrorists in his sample are middle class. (Here and elsewhere, Sageman's findings overlap with those in two indispensable books, Robert Pape's *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* and Alan Krueger's *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism*.) If we wish to make finer distinctions, we will find that those in the first wave of Islamic terrorists, in the 1980s, were equally divided between upper class and middle class, while the second wave, in the 1990s, involved mainly the middle class. The third wave, consisting of the generation that followed the invasion of Iraq, has middle-class to lower-class roots. But even in the third wave, there is no correlation between being poor and being a terrorist.

Sageman finds that terrorists are neither sociopaths nor psychopaths. Very few people in his data set display any kind of mental disorder. Indeed, Sageman notes that the low incidence of disorders suggests that "as a group, global Islamist terrorists may be in better mental health than the rest of the population." Some people have speculated that terrorists suffer from sexual frustration, but the vast majority of global Islamic terrorists are married, and two-thirds of them have children. Most Islamic terrorists lack any kind of criminal history. Many people think that terrorists are poorly educated, but here, too, the evidence goes the other way. Sageman finds that nearly two-thirds attended university, a rate that sharply contrasts with that in their home countries, in which fewer than 10 percent go beyond high school. Indeed, the percentage of terrorists who attended university actually exceeds the average rate in the United States (slightly over 50 percent)! And while trauma is often thought to help explain terrorism, Sageman finds little in the background of Islamic terrorists.

It is tempting to believe that terrorists have been indoctrinated or, in a sense, "brainwashed," religiously or otherwise. Indeed, the Saudi government has explicitly attributed terrorist attacks to religious brainwashing. But Sageman's data does not support this belief. He finds that jihadis are typically not well educated in religion. In Sageman's data set, only about one-fourth were deeply religious when young, and about two-thirds were secular. Nor do Islamic terrorists show much immersion in religion. He finds that the religious understanding of the majority of terrorists "is limited; they know about as much as any secular person, which is to say, very little. Often, they have not started reading the Quran seriously until they are in prison, because then it is provided to them and they have lots of time to read it." (Sageman is not focusing here on the leadership or contending that Al Qaeda leaders are not intensely theological.)

What, then, does lead people to become terrorists? Social networks and group dynamics turn out to be crucial. Here is an initial clue: a strong majority of people in Sageman's sample were expatriates, and joined a terrorist organization while residing in a nation in which they did not grow up. Indeed, four-fifths of his sample included people who were either expatriates or sons or grandsons of Muslim immigrants to the West. They joined the global Islamist terrorist social movement as a result of either friendship or kinship. Coming to the West as young adults, many of them searched for and found childhood friends in their new country, and eventually became involved in terrorism as a result. Many others joined relatives who were already part of the terrorist movement. Still others consisted of "a 'bunch of guys' who collectively decided to join a terrorist organization."

Sageman is especially intrigued by that "bunch of guys." He emphasizes that Is-

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lamic terrorism has been spurred to a considerable extent by the spontaneous self-organization of informal collections of people. In most cases, the ideological commitment was pre-dated by social bonds. Friendship and family first; political extremism second. Sageman registers his own surprise at "the lack of a top-down recruitment program into al Qaeda. There was no campaign drive for new members, no dedicated committee for recruitment, and no budget allocated specifically for this task."

Sageman describes a process of radicalization that starts with a degree of moral outrage. Many eventual terrorists see, on the Internet or on television, greatly disturbing events and images, such as the killing of Muslim children. For some people, the resulting sense of outrage becomes part of a broader narrative in which "wannabe terrorists" come to understand themselves as engaged in a kind of war against those who are plotting against people such as themselves. That narrative will not make sense to everyone, of course. It must also resonate with personal experiences. For many Muslim expatriates in Europe, those experiences include exclusion and discrimination. Expatriates and second-generation Muslims "compare themselves to their host peers. In Europe, they do not fare as well as the host young men. . . . They interpret their perceived discrimination in the context of moral violations against Muslims elsewhere, and the notion that their local grievances are part of a more general hostility against Islam appears more compelling to them."

Sageman is well aware that belief in the resulting narratives need not produce terrorism. In his account, a willingness to commit violent acts emerges as a result of social networks of two different kinds: face-to-face groups and virtual, online groups. The former include radical mosques and radical Muslim student organizations, consisting largely of people who came to the West to study. These relatively informal groups exercise a major influence. In the extreme cases, they create a sense of a collective identity, whose members "started living in their own world." Some of Sageman's most illuminating passages trace the distinctive nature of the underlying interactions, in which intense group dynamics, spawning a process of "in-group love," ensure that "the group acts as an interactive 'echo chamber,' encouraging escalation of grievances and beliefs in conspiracy to the point of hatred."

Group members are not exactly irrational; instead, their sources of knowledge become sharply limited. They come to rely exclusively on one another to validate new information, and everything that they believe is a product of interactions within their small enclaves. Thus "they discard information refuting their beliefs as propaganda from the West." It is important to note also that some group members reject the process of radicalization. They leave, ensuring a situation of voluntary sorting and self-selection in which "only the true believers remain." Those believers regard themselves as "best friends and a substitute for family." For them, it is especially difficult to depart.

Until 2004, face-to-face interactions played the key role in producing terrorist networks. More recently, the Internet has assumed great importance. Sageman emphasizes that the traditional hierarchy of terrorist groups is undermined by the Internet, which leads to a form of spontaneous self-organization. Chat rooms and dedicated forums inspire many young Muslims to join the Islamic terrorist movement. As Sageman describes it, the role of the Internet has been unplanned, unruly, and dangerous. As police began to monitor physical meeting spaces, especially in Europe, like-minded young people started to exchange views and information online. Sageman's particular emphasis here is on active rather than passive users. Websites are far less relevant than blogs and chat rooms, in which echo chambers help to radicalize people online. "The new forums have the same influence that these radical mosques played in the previous generation of terrorists," he writes. Conspiracy theories, fueling outrage, are spread in rapid fashion, as "individuals seek and select the rooms most compatible with their views and abandon the ones they disagree with. In a sense, the followers vote with their mice and select the views they like."

Offline, those who might believe that they are isolated in their anger and fear, or in their incipient convictions, might be tempted to start thinking about something else. But they can easily find one another through the Internet, and they become more extreme in their beliefs, simply because so many people seem to agree with them. Sageman thinks that Islamic terrorism reflects an even broader problem here. "Let's assume that a very few people in the world share the same strange belief, say that the moon is made of green cheese. Through a process of self-selection, they find each other on the same forum. . . . Soon, they will assume that everyone shares this conviction because only the true believers air their views and the rest stay silent." Through this process, strange and potentially dangerous beliefs, which would otherwise fall of their own weight, can be hardened as a result of the Internet.

With this understanding of the role of social dynamics, Sageman wants to explain why it is that Europe has experienced a set of attacks after the events of September 11, while the United States has not. He believes that the United States is far safer than Europe, and that the United States does not face a significant threat of homegrown extremism; but he does not think that the explanation lies mostly in the efforts of the United States to combat terror. Instead, he urges that, for cultural reasons, radicalization of Muslims is much more likely in Europe than in the United States. In the United States, the idea of the melting pot promotes the acceptance of people of diverse backgrounds, including foreigners, and increases the likelihood of eventual integration into society. In Europe, Muslims are far more likely to complain about exclusion and discrimination than in the United States. It follows that the United States is simply not breeding Al Qaeda networks: "For most American Muslims, the terrorist message does not become a catalyst to action as it does for their European counterparts, since it does not resonate with their beliefs or personal experience." Here Sageman points to the valuable unintended consequence of an open culture: "For the United States, pursuing policies of political, social, and economic inclusion rather than exclusion has paid an enormous dividend."

Sageman acknowledges that in some areas Al Qaeda is regrouping and consolidating, but he argues that there is no general resurgence. "Al Qaeda Central is of course not dead, but it is still contained operationally. It puts out inspirational guidance on the Internet, but does not have the means to exert command and control over the al Qaeda social movement." Sageman wants the United States to come to terms with the proliferation of homegrown terrorist networks lacking any physical link to Al Qaeda Central. The good news is that its members are "far less skilled and adept than the terrorists prior to 9/11." The bad news is that because "the number of wannabe terrorists remains large . . . by the law of averages some are bound to be smart and bold enough to pull off an attack."

What follows from this diagnosis? A new focus should be placed on the social movement and its appeal to young people, which is "sustained by U.S. actions that are

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perceived to be a war on Islam." To weaken that appeal, Sageman suggests that the United States should attempt to remove the thrill and glory associated with terrorism, among other things by reducing terrorists to common criminals. To accomplish that task, the United States should cease to hold press conferences in which captured terrorists are prominently mentioned. He believes that, as a tactical matter, security is best promoted through quiet arrests and prosecutions, which deprive terrorists of a public stage. Sageman also wants both the United States and Europe to eliminate discrimination against Muslims—a step that, in his view, will reduce the appeal of terrorist networks.

Sageman is especially concerned about "jihadi cool," a focus of Muslim enclaves in Europe and in Internet chat rooms. Thus far, he says, the "battle is completely one-sided. The true believers, who populate the radical forums, are working themselves into a frenzy with no moderate voice present to calm them down. This leads to ever greater radicalization on the part of the participants, who slowly take on the views of their friends." Sageman wants "to take the glory out of terrorism by demilitarizing the conflict except for sanctuary denial and by reducing terrorists to the status of common criminals." Hence Sageman seeks to diminish Muslim moral outrage "globally by withdrawing from Iraq and locally through restraint in the aftermath of terrorism operations."

Sageman has produced two overlapping books—the first relatively narrow, the second far more ambitious. The narrow one features his analysis of his database. The more ambitious book offers general lessons about the arc of terrorism over time and the appropriate response to it. Let us explore these in sequence.

Many of Sageman's conclusions—for example, that terrorists are not poor, badly educated, or insane—are not new, and they are supported by other studies. Sageman's distinctive contribution lies in his emphasis on social interactions among like-minded people, and in particular the effects of enclaves of young Muslims. While Sageman does not refer to it, some of the most intriguing work in modern social science explores the very phenomenon that he is describing, where it is known as "group polarization." Sageman is actually offering a particular illustration of that much broader phenomenon. The central empirical finding is that after deliberating with one another, group members typically end up in a more extreme position in line with their pre-deliberation tendencies. Group polarization is essentially a form of radicalization. It is found in jury deliberations about appropriate punishment; it can be found in many other areas as well.

Suppose, for example, that a deliberating group consists mostly of people who are concerned about climate change, or who believe that affirmative action is a bad idea. After group members speak with one another, they will be all the more concerned about climate change, and all the more unhappy with affirmative action. Group polarization has been demonstrated in over a dozen nations and in numerous areas; those found to be subject to polarization include jurors, ordinary citizens, burglars, and entrepreneurs. Enclaves of like-minded people move to the extremes. The liberal citizens of Boulder have been found to move sharply to the left after speaking with one another; the conservative citizens of Colorado Springs have been found to move sharply to the right. Even federal judges tend to polarize. On three-judge panels consisting solely of Republican appointees, Republican appointees show far more conservative voting patterns than on three-judge panels having at least one Democratic appointee. Democratic appointees show exactly the same tendency; they are far more liberal on panels consisting of all Democratic appointees than on panels with one or more Republican.

Why does group polarization occur? There are two major answers, and they bear directly on Sageman's findings. First, the exchange of views and information can intensify pre-existing beliefs. In any group with some predisposition (in favor of the Republican candidate, concern about climate change, opposition to same-sex marriage), the pool of arguments will inevitably be skewed toward the original predisposition. If group members are listening to one another's arguments, they are likely to become more extreme in their views. The second reason involves people's concern for their reputations. Most people want to be perceived favorably by other group members, and also to perceive themselves favorably. Once they hear what others believe, many of them will adjust their positions at least slightly in the direction of the dominant position. Without invoking the concept, Sageman has provided a dramatic case study in group polarization, and both of the standard explanations play key roles in the process of radicalization that he describes.

Sageman also offers a nice twist, involving the crucial importance of voluntary sorting. Radicalization, in his account, is promoted by people's decision to sort themselves into offline and online groups, and it is significantly increased by the fact that at a certain stage, those "who believe that the group has gone too far in their growing radicalization peel off. . . . At the end, only the true believers remain." On the Internet, such sorting is especially important, as online jihadis can choose their preferred forums, and often end up in discussion groups that promote violence. Long before the attacks of 2001, the experimental evidence found that extremists are especially prone to polarization; and if true believers are the only ones left, radical movements should not be surprising.

Sageman's claims here are plausible, informative, and even important, but they raise an obvious question. Has he really succeeded in applying "the scientific method to terrorism research"? To his credit, he has compiled a large database, and he offers some noteworthy findings, such as the low percentage of

Autobiography—As a Vase

Like porcelain thrown before birth—
both shattered and sensing the glue.

Complete, but already crazed with breaking.
Someone polishes it on the mantle.

Someone is trying to put it back
together. Someone is watching

it fall. Someone was the hand,
the air. Someone is the moment

when damaged is a fact but the shape
remains. Someone is that sudden

injection of space, that collapse. Someone
is the pieces, the dustpan, the glue.

Someone is the worklight, the patience,
the room. Someone meant for this to happen.

Someone has to decide: repair or dismiss.
It happens all at once. It happens forever.

In this story you can be everything
and everyone except unbroken.

LESLIE HARRISON

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terrorists who are poor, badly educated, or mentally ill—and the high percentage who are married, expatriates, and close relatives of those already involved with Islamist terrorism. But he does not bring his database into close contact with his central narrative about the role of social networks. Sageman emphasizes various "prongs of radicalization," including moral outrage, perception of a war against Islam, resonance with personal experience, and mobilization by networks. But he does not specify, as a social scientist would, how these "prongs" help to account for the ultimate paths of fifty, one hundred, two hundred, or four hundred people in his five-hundred-person database. There is no statistical analysis here.

There is a deeper problem, which is known in the trade as "sampling on the dependent variable." Suppose that I have a database of two hundred major-league baseball players; and suppose I find that while very few of them are poor, poorly educated, or mentally ill, a strong majority had at least one parent who was a registered Republican, or who attended church regularly. Would I be entitled to conclude that having such parents "made" people major-league baseball players, or was a necessary or sufficient condition for becoming one? Of course not. Many people with such parents do not become major-league baseball players—and even if all players had such parents, we could not infer causation.

Here is another way to put the point. Suppose that Sageman finds one hundred groups of people who ultimately become terrorists, and could show that those people are more extreme than before they joined the group. But suppose that there are nine hundred other groups, of which eight hundred consist of people who became no more radical when they joined together, and of which one hundred consist of people who became less radical when they joined together and exchanged views. Then we would see randomness, not any causal phenomenon. In short, Sageman's database and method do not permit him to compare those who became terrorists with those who did not; and for all their plausibility, his claims about the causal force of networks have not been shown to count as social science. So the core narrative of his book has not been adequately corroborated by his own evidence.

Sageman's more ambitious goal is to offer suggestions about how to respond to a significant shift in the nature of the terrorist threat. Emphasizing that Al Qaeda Central has been effectively contained, he urges a new focus on the danger posed by the leaderless jihad. For the United States, he believes that homegrown terrorism is not the most serious problem, because of the absence of (much) discrimination, and because the widely held belief in the melting pot and the commitment to freedom of opportunity help to ensure that Muslims do not become a self-enclosed enclave of people prone to radicalization. For Europe, the prescription is essentially to become more like the United States. And for the United States, the prescription is essentially to maintain our best traditions, because they are a recipe for increased security.

Sageman is right to emphasize the importance of introducing moderation into both offline and online discussions among Muslims. He objects to a process that leads to "ever greater radicalization on the part of the participants, who slowly take on the views of their friends." Sageman wants the online battle to include influential opinion leaders who "embrace nonviolence as a way to fulfill Muslim aspirations. This campaign should be conducted by other Muslims." On this count, Sageman is on strong empirical ground. It is well established that the process of radicalization, or group polarization, can be reduced if groups begin with a degree of diversity. Such diversity also alters the information that is presented within group deliberations; it alters the social pressures that lead people toward extreme positions.

Unfortunately, many of Sageman's broader claims are more impressionistic and intuitive, and they are not exactly supported by the "scientific method." Sageman thinks that the United States and its allies can reduce the appeal of Islamic terrorism essentially by reducing the volume of the war on terror—by eliminating press conferences that celebrate captures and victories, and by ensuring that arrests and prosecutions are kept quiet. He adds that the United States faces a limited risk of homegrown terrorism simply because of its openness. More ambitiously, he goes so far as to argue that a military strategy is counterproductive and self-defeating because it helps to radicalize "a new wave of young jihadists who have been led to believe that America is establishing a base in the Middle East in order to exploit oil resources and dominate the region." Strikingly, Sageman concludes that "the only military role in the overall strategy to fight global Islamist terrorism should be to deny terrorists sanctuary."

ANTHONY RUSSO

Maybe so. But Sageman does not show that his own evidence adequately justifies these conclusions. England is hardly the land of the melting pot, but in recent decades its leaders have worked hard to be nondiscriminatory and openly multicultural—and yet it has spawned a great deal of terrorism. And with all its openness, the United States has not been immune. José Padilla and the Lackawanna Six were homegrown terrorists, and the New Jersey Islamic terrorists who first bombed the World Trade Center operated within American borders. Sageman may be too optimistic about the effects of openness and non-discrimination, at least for people who, for one reason or another, are intensely committed to their ethnic or religious heritage, and after banding together, seek to use violence to redress historical grievances.

True, we know that many people become terrorists as a result of a process of radicalization. But we do not know exactly how dangerous members of the "third wave" actually are, nor do we know how much the United States has contributed to their numbers by publicizing the capture of our enemies and through military action. Sageman himself emphasizes that the weakening of Al Qaeda Central was achieved in large part by the detention and death of key personnel and by the closing of training camps in Afghanistan; but those achievements were emphatically a result of military action. Sageman is probably right to say that the war in Iraq has produced a large number of new terrorists, but on this count he has no science to offer. Indeed, nothing in Sageman's book shows that military action is unjustified, on balance, unless it denies terrorists a sanctuary. Where is the empirical support for this sweeping national-security claim?

To this extent, Sageman has not achieved his goal of providing "evidence-based terrorism research." Still, his emphasis on the role of social networks, and on the process of radicalization, greatly illuminates the emerging situation—and shows why aggressive acts, by the United States and others, may actually decrease security. Equally important, his elaboration of what is in effect a case study in group polarization offers a number of provocative lessons for understanding not only Islamic terrorism, but also other domains in which extremism is the eventual result of voluntary self-sorting—with destructive and even deadly consequences. ◆

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David N. Myers

VICTORY AND SORROW

KHIRBET KHIZEH
By S. Yizhar
Translated by Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck
(Ibis Editions, 134 pp., $16.95)

The short history of Hebrew as a modern language has yielded, over the course of little more than a century, an impressively long list of literary masters—the early twentieth-century Brenner and Bialik; the mid-century Nobel laureate Agnon; and the renowned contemporaries Amichai, Oz, Yehoshua, and Grossman. Much less known outside Israel, but certainly one of the most significant figures in the Hebrew literary canon, is Yizhar Smilansky, who wrote under the transposed pen name S. Yizhar, and died in Israel two years ago. Stylistically, Yizhar was a quiet revolutionary, expanding the register of literary Hebrew through a modern style that attended to the cadences and the phrasings of the Bible. With a sharp eye for physical description, Yizhar artfully lavished words upon the landscape of his land. He slowly unfolded its forbidding beauty in Faulknerian sentences that morphed into stream-of-consciousness paragraphs, whose hypnotic rhythm was periodically jolted by sharp ruptures in the plot. And thematically he was a stealthy provocateur, alternately planting bravado and self-doubt, insouciance and moral indignation, in his protagonists—ambivalent characters who both upheld and undermined the Zionist narrative of noble struggle for the ancient Jewish homeland.

This iconoclastic side notwithstanding, Yizhar came to be known by many contemporaries and critics as the quintessential writer of his generation—the so-called Palmach Generation (named after the Haganah strike force that played a leading role in the Jewish fight for Palestine in 1948). A good part of this reputation is owed to the *summa summarum* of Yizhar's literary career, a sprawling 1,100-page novel about the war of 1948 called *Yeme Ziklag*, or *The Days of Ziklag*, which appeared in 1958. The novel depicted in exhaustive detail the activities and the emotions of a group of young Israeli soldiers engaged in a week-long battle in 1948. The decidedly unheroic account of the soldiers leads one to wonder whether Yizhar really belongs to the Palmach Generation. As the literary scholar Dan Miron has observed, he was born five to ten years before other members of this generation, and he did not share in the euphoric spirit of triumph and redemption that accompanied the Jewish victory in 1948.

Nowhere is this lack of euphoria, this unexpected dourness of historical vision, clearer than in a novella that Yizhar wrote in 1949, a year after the war in which he participated as an intelligence officer. *Khirbet Khizeh* was published along with a much briefer short story, "*Ha-Shavui*," or "The Prisoner," which tells of an army unit's capture and mistreatment of an innocent Arab shepherd; but it was *Khirbet Khizeh* that became a cause célèbre in Israel. Thousands of copies were sold, and reviews and discussions of the novella swirled in the Israeli press for months, even years. What stood at the center of this remarkable work—and what provoked so much controversy in its day—was Yizhar's portrayal of an Israeli army unit called upon to stake out, occupy, and then expel the residents of a fictional Palestinian Arab town called Khirbet Khizeh, which had been vanquished in the war. Yizhar's typically languid pacing, whereby the unit is beset by boredom and puerile squabbles as it aimlessly wanders the countryside awaiting orders, is undone by the brutality and indifference of the Israeli soldiers as they expel the Arab residents from the village.

Yizhar's story challenged, to put it mildly, the sense of virtue that accompanied the carefully cultivated Zionist image of a new Jewish man, the legendary sabra. No longer content to be a passive victim of history like his Diaspora Jewish cousins, this new Jew was virile, armed, and prepared to fight for his land—but always, it was said, according to an exacting ethical code, the vaunted principle of "purity of arms" that was a doctrine of the new Israeli army. Striking an extraordinary balance between intimacy and detachment, *Khirbet Khizeh* rattled this myth of the noble sabra and his purity. It cast doubt on the received account of the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem, according to which Palestinian Arabs fled their homes of their own volition or at the behest of Arab leaders. Instead, Yizhar painted a vivid portrait of expulsion. His story provoked a storm in the newspapers and journals of the nascent state of Israel, with some critics lauding the writer's honesty and courage, and others denouncing his work as imbalanced and even treasonous. The historian Anita Shapira has carefully chronicled its immediate reception and its subsequent appearances in Israeli public culture—for example, as a required text in Israeli schools in 1964, and as a television movie in 1978. She shows that the original boldness of *Khirbet Khizeh* was somewhat lost in the controversies over the story's historical veracity and political suitability—debates that reflected the complicated evolution of Israeli public memory of 1948.

Both the novella's literary merits and the lingering effects of its call for self-reckoning have prompted the small Jerusalem publishing house Ibis Editions to add *Khirbet Khizeh* to its fine list of titles, mainly books translated from Hebrew and Arabic. Although a few of Yizhar's other writings (but not yet his huge masterpiece) have been translated, *Khirbet Khizeh* appears in English here for the first time, and it is long overdue. The rendering from the Hebrew by Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck is graceful and fluid, with but a few minor infelicities. Their important translation will enable Yizhar to gain the readership outside of Israel that his work so richly deserves.

Khirbet Khizeh opens with the recollection of the narrator that "it all happened a long time ago, but it has haunted me ever since. . . .How easy it had been," he marvels, "to be seduced, to be knowingly led astray and join the great general mass of liars." It is not evident at this point—in fact, it is not evident until the end—what the exact source of the narrator's psychic discomfort is. But a significant clue is given soon enough, when the narrator avers that one way he could begin to unravel his story is by mentioning the "operational order" that guided his unit on "a clear splendid winter morning." The unit was operating just after military hostilities between the Jewish and Arab sides in the war of 1948 had concluded. This was a period of ongoing instability, when Israeli forces were attempting to pacify hostile Arab villages and towns as well as to stem the tide of "infiltration," when thousands of Pales-

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tinian Arabs sought to steal back across the border from neighboring Arab countries, mostly to return to their homes and reconnect with relatives, but in a small number of cases to engage in terrorist activity. In this fragile environment, the narrator reports that an initial order was given to his unit to "assemble the inhabitants of the area extending from point X (see attached map) to point Y (see same map)—load them onto transports, and convey them across our lines; blow up the stone houses, and burn the huts; detain the youths and the suspects, and clear the area of 'hostile forces.'" With a trace of the withering irony that will characterize his stance of omniscient but paralyzing passivity throughout, the narrator takes aim at the claims of Zionist chivalry: the order would no doubt be carried out, he remarks, with "courtesy and with a restraint born of true culture"—indeed, as a reflection of "the Jewish soul, the great Jewish soul."

The fictional order received by the narrator's unit calls to mind the notorious *Tokhnit Dalet*, or Plan D, of the Haganah, the pre-state military unit. Formulated in early March 1948, the plan signaled a shift from a defensive strategy to an offensive one, as the Jewish forces struggled to gain control over Palestine during the waning months of the British Mandate. Among its central features was the granting of discretion to commanders on the ground to decide what to do with conquered Arab villages. They were afforded the option, according to the plan, of "the destruction of villages (setting fire, blowing up, and planting mines)" or, in the case of resistance, "destruction of the armed force and expulsion of the population beyond the country's borders."

The precise intent of Plan D has been much disputed. Was it a mandate for the systematic and wholesale transfer of the Arab population of Palestine, or a much more localized and improvisatory order? Without frontally engaging this question, *Khirbet Khizeh* does succeed in capturing the mentality of soldiers called upon to "clear away"—or perhaps more faithfully to Yizhar's *letaher,* to "cleanse"—a single village. Yizhar brilliantly captures the feelings—and consequences—of ennui as the Israeli army unit sits in wait for the final directive to enter Khirbet Khizeh. Boredom, in such a setting, is a corrosive force, allowing for rage, vengeance, and pettiness to escape the bounds of social and military convention. Yizhar is at his writerly best in capturing it. War was his recurrent theme, but his finest literary moments come in describing not the searing heat of battle but "the ruthless long waiting." It is in this realm of suspension and dread that the narrator of *Khirbet Khizeh* reveals his inner conflicts—at once willing to go along with the small chatter, sadistic pranks, and anti-Arab racism of his comrades and at the same time attempting to preserve a modicum of conscience and decency.

For much of the story, he goes along and gets along—as, for example, when the unit is shaken out of its torpor upon receipt of the order to move into Khirbet Khizeh. The soldiers unleash volley after volley of machine-gun fire intended to flush out any living being left in the village. Four Arab men manage to flee in the opposite direction, inducing a weird titillation among the Jewish soldiers. "We were getting excited," the narrator reports. "The thrill of the hunt that lurks inside every man had taken firm hold of us." Firing ceaselessly at the fugitives, the soldiers manage to miss their targets with impressive though unintended incompetence. Finally the narrator, who had been silent throughout the barrage, screws up the courage to utter a few humanizing words before trailing off: "Let them be—you won't hit them anyway.... It's pointless. Too bad."

His occasional pangs of conscience stand in stark contrast to the condescension and outright revulsion of his comrades toward "Ayrabs" (de Lange and Dweck's ingenious translation for the derogatory Hebrew term *arabush*), who are cast as uniformly primitive, cowardly, and barely capable of human speech. On a subsequent occasion, after scores of villagers have been rounded up, the commander of the unit, Moishe, issues a direct order to expel them and then raze the village. The narrator again screws up his courage to speak: "Do we really have to expel them? What more can these people do? Who can they hurt?" After several minutes of exchange with his fellow soldiers, he is told to shut up—and he dutifully complies.

Writing just four years after the end of the Holocaust, Yizhar is unsparing in exposing the narrator's impotence, as well as the utter indifference of the other soldiers as they push along and load up the remaining villagers for deportation, ignoring their cries for help. The soldiers' callous disregard, even at the sight of a sickly newborn, works together with the narrator's paralysis to create a feeling of profound hopelessness, a sort of Israeli *No Exit*, as if there were no sense in attempting to escape the moral morass. What makes the scenes of deportation in *Khirbet Khizeh* all the more haunting is how easily they conjure up images of forced population removal from the recent and not-so-recent past—images that are deeply imprinted in Jewish memory, as well as in our contemporary consciousness.

In contemplating the actions of his unit, the narrator happens onto the most tragic irony of the conflict between Jews and Arabs over Palestine: the fact that the histories of the two peoples were eerily parallel in many ways, perhaps no more so than at the very moment when the Jews decisively left behind exile and the Palestinians decisively entered it. This sudden realization shakes the narrator to the core:

> I had never been in the Diaspora—I said to myself—I had never known what it was like ... but people had spoken to me, told me, taught me, and repeatedly recited to me, from every direction, in books and newspapers, everywhere: exile. They had played on all my nerves. Our nation's protest to the world: exile! It had entered me, apparently with my mother's milk. What, in fact, had we perpetrated here today?

Convulsed by "tremors running through me," the narrator prepares to confront his commander one more time. He manages to stammer that "this is a filthy war." Moishe blurts in response: "Immigrants of ours will come to this Khirbet what's-its-name, you hear me, and they'll take this land and work it and it'll be beautiful here!" This retort pushes the narrator to the edge of madness as he strains to absorb the image of the seamless passage of one group into the homes of another without so much as a word of protest from his fellow soldiers. The novella reaches its emotional crescendo in a howl that must have taken away the breath of its Israeli readers:

> My guts cried out. Colonizers, they shouted. Lies, my guts shouted. Khirbet Khizeh is not ours. The Spandau gun never gave us any rights. Oh, my guts screamed. What hadn't they told us about refugees. Everything, everything was for the refugees, their welfare, their rescue ... our refugees, naturally. Those we were driving out—that was a totally different matter. Wait. Two thousand years of exile. The whole story. Jews being killed. Europe. We were the masters now.

The narrator's grave qualms about the Jews' budding experiment with power—that they had become, in the lacerating

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words of Proverbs, "like a servant who comes to reign"—are especially poignant in that they never reach the ears of another soul. Returning again to the theme of moral paralysis and its companion, silent complicity, Yizhar has his narrator cry out only to himself. This famous and futile scream, this act of moral evisceration and the attendant disappearance of any shred of agency, paves the way for the story's final sentence. Evoking a line from Genesis in which God promises to descend to undertake a moral reckoning of Sodom and Gomorrah, the narrator observes the calmness that has fallen over the valley in which Khirbet Khizeh was located and concludes that at some point "God would come forth and descend to roam the valley, and see whether all was according to the cry that had reached him."

It was the famous observation of young Gershom Scholem, writing to Franz Rosenzweig in 1926, that the Hebrew language in its modern secular guise still contained an "apocalyptic thorn." The biblical echo of *Khirbet Khizeh's* final sentence is a kind of apocalyptic thorn, serving to warn against the belief that Jews operating under the Zionist flag can seize control of their own historical fate, and thereby liberate themselves, with moral impunity. The contingencies of history—or the judgment of an inscrutable God—can easily produce another deluge, transforming apparent winners into losers and the just into the unjust.

This is what Yizhar seems to be suggesting, and it is most surprising that he does so. I say surprising because in his own society Yizhar was not at all a marginal man. He was born in 1916 into the heart and soul of the Zionist settlement project in Palestine, in Rehovot, to a well-known family of stalwart Zionists. His great-uncle Moshe Smilansky was one of the leaders of the first wave of Zionist settlers in Palestine and a prominent personality in the Yishuv. Yizhar, for his part, never surrendered his family's Zionist commitments. He fought in the 1948 war, and David Ben-Gurion, the towering political figure of the era, was his friend. He served for seventeen years as a member of the Knesset, a six-term parliamentarian from Mapai, Ben-Gurion's mainstream Labor Zionist party, which dominated political life for the state's first three decades.

How, then, to make sense of Yizhar's act of literary dissidence, his fierce independence in exposing the moral numbness and psychological opacity of the soldiers in *Khirbet Khizeh*? After all, Israeli society in the wake of the war placed great value on conformism as the new state sought to secure economic and military stability, ever fearful of a "second round" of fighting from the Arab side. Yizhar was unwilling to follow in the path of most of his countrymen in ignoring or justifying the plight of the Palestinians. Lecturing to a group of Zionist youth after the war, he spoke candidly about a great deception perpetrated by Zionist leaders: "They planted deep in the heart of everyone that there is place for two peoples in this country—that one does not need to push the other out." And yet now, he continued, they tell us that "there is no room for Arabs in this country. They are not trustworthy, they can be a fifth column during wartime. This country is indeed only for Jews, since the Jew has no other place in the world other than this country." Although he did not consistently advocate the cause of the Palestinians or the refugees throughout his life, Yizhar remained attuned to the moral and political blemishes of the Zionist movement. In 1990 he spoke of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza at a memorial for Martin Buber: "The Palestinian question is not an Arab question, but entirely a Jewish question.... It is a question for the Jews and a question for Judaism. And instead of continuing to run away from it, one must stop and turn to face it, turn and look at it directly."

It has often been noted that Hebrew literature has assumed, in the words of Todd Hasak-Lowy, a "critical and oppositional stance vis-à-vis the (political) establishment." Yizhar was a perfect representative of this tendency. So, too, was the young A.B. Yehoshua, writing twenty years after *Khirbet Khizeh*, in a seminal short story called "*Mul ha-ye'arot*," or "Facing the Forest," in which the Jewish protagonist silently assents to the destruction of a forest by an Arab whose destroyed village once stood in its place. This dissenting current has been continued by Israeli writers today, notably including Oz and Grossman. What is striking is that all these figures, from Yizhar to the present, are undeniably part of the political and cultural establishment of Israel, serving as official or unofficial representatives of the state, especially when abroad. This is not to say, of course, that the robust Israeli public square censors out all radical or transgressive voices in its midst. (To give but one small example: there is, amid the cacophony of the Israeli press, a Hebrew-language journal called *Sedek* devoted to the *Nakba*, as the Palestinian "catastrophe" of 1948 is known in Arabic.) It is to observe that the tradition of criticism issuing from prominent Hebrew writers toward the establishment most often emerges from within the establishment itself.

At the same time, it is undeniable that the bounds of the establishment change over time. There was a three-decade-long period during which the narrative of self-induced Arab flight went largely unchallenged in Israel. Then, in the 1980s, the "New Historians" began to call into question this pillar (and a number of others) of Israeli collective memory. Benny Morris, in a series of works beginning with *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (1987), relied on a massive trove of new archival sources to document the extent of forced removal by Jewish forces of Palestinian Arabs in 1948. A great deal of controversy attended Morris and his fellow revisionist historians in the 1990s. Over time, though, their work has begun to shift the terms of public debate from outright denial of forced expulsions to a widening admission that they took place.

The New Historians were far from the first ones to point to Israel's role in the exodus of Palestinian refugees. A long line of Palestinian scholars, including Arif al-Arif and Walid Khalidi, have traced the contours and effects of the Nakba for decades. And in 1959, the Iraqi-born Israeli scholar Rony Gabbay published a six-hundred-page study of the Arab refugee problem called *A Political Study of the Arab-Jewish Conflict*, in which he documented a "radical change"—from a defensive to an offensive posture—on the part of Jewish forces toward the Arab population of Palestine in the spring of 1948. He also determined that "in some cases, reluctant Arabs were forced to flee into Arab country."

Even before Gabbay—indeed, in the midst of the war itself and in its immediate aftermath—there was open discussion of expulsions, and of the repatriation of Arab refugees, in Israeli political parties, newspapers, and government circles. In 1950, the young journalist Uri Avnery wrote a wartime memoir, *Ha-tsad ha-sheni shel ha-matbe'a*, or *The Other Side of the Coin*, that discussed the kind of cruelty, indifference, and violence by Israeli soldiers toward innocent Palestinian Arabs that Yizhar depicted in *Khirbet Khizeh*. Even earlier, in late July 1948, Meir Ya'ari, one of the leaders of the leftist Mapam party, published in the party newspaper *Al ha-mishmar* a set of remarks that he had delivered earlier that summer expressing incredulity at his comrades' mixture of glee and de-

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nial. They deluded themselves into the belief that "we didn't expel [the Arabs]. They ran away of their own accord. In any event, our borders are narrow. Why shouldn't we inherit the land after they dispossessed themselves? Why shouldn't we cleanse the terrain and grab this unexpected opportunity?" Two days later, another party member wrote in the same paper that "the vast majority of the villagers did not collaborate with the invaders [the Arab armies], and we should accept these residents back into our state as citizens with full rights."

Such sentiments, both regarding acts of expulsion and the advisability of some form of repatriation for Palestinian refugees, were not unique to *Al ha-mishmar*, but appeared in other publications of the Israeli left. A rare voice of concern was heard even in the more centrist Mapai party of Ben-Gurion. Benny Morris has recorded a Mapai party discussion from June 1948 in which a number of members demanded to know if expulsions were in fact taking place, as had been widely rumored. One of them, Shmuel Yavnieli, expressed his opinion that Jews who had suffered persecution were now acting like "servants who reign."

The presence of such agitation over the behavior of Jewish forces suggests that Israelis knew about, discussed, and felt remorse over expulsions already in 1948. It also places Yizhar's *Khirbet Khizeh* in a broader historical context. To be sure, his was not a normative voice in Israeli society. But Yizhar did dwell at the center of his society, and the position of the narrator in his story, caught between the indifference of his fellow soldiers and his own disgust at the acts of expulsions of his unit, reflected that of hundreds, if not thousands, of Israeli combatants. It was Yizhar's particular achievement to address this predicament with poignancy, introspection, and an honesty that few have ever matched. Pushing the bounds of acceptable discourse, Yizhar proceeded to a place of profound self-revelation without reaching the point of self-abnegation.

Almost sixty years after the publication of *Khirbet Khizeh*, Israeli writers and intellectuals continue the tradition of "connected criticism" (the term is Michael Walzer's) so distinctly personified by Yizhar. For the most part, they focus on the burdensome political and moral costs of the occupation that was a consequence of the Six Day War in 1967. By contrast, 1948 remains an extraordinarily charged subject, even after the trailblazing work of the New Historians. The assumption that mentioning the Palestinian refugee problem necessarily calls into question the right of the state of Israel to exist still serves as a major deterrent to serious engagement by many Israelis—and by many of Israel's friends abroad. Alan Dershowitz's *The Case for Israel*, a canonical source for Israel's advocates in this country, rehearses the argument that panic and exhortations from their leaders were the chief reasons for the flight of Palestinians. In his chapter "Did Israel Create the Arab Refugee Problem?", Dershowitz offers only the vague statement that "the military actions of the Haganah certainly contributed to the flight," and follows the old script by noting only one instance of violent action by Jewish forces against Palestinian Arabs: the massacre by Jewish forces at Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948.

Such obfuscation is of no value to the cause of truth or the cause of peace. Accept the truth from whoever says it, the rabbis taught. The pressing question is not whether raising the refugee question undermines the state of Israel. It is, rather, whether Israel can avoid confronting it any longer. This is not to say that the refugee question is the sole matter on which resolution of the Palestinian conflict hinges. It is also not to say that Israel bears sole responsibility for resolving the long-standing refugee problem: the Palestinians' own leaders and the neighboring Arab states have had a major hand in perpetuating it. (Nor, for that matter, is it to say that the oft-deferred claims of the Jews who were forced from Arab lands and suffered massive property losses after 1948 can be justified any longer, though one must add that the two instances are not quite symmetrical.)

It is to say only—though this is saying a lot—that the deep wound of the Nakba must finally be exposed to the light of day, and in some way be healed, if there is to be any hope for progress and peace between Jews and Arabs in the land known as Israel and Palestine. The return of Palestinian refugees to their old homes in the current state of Israel is an impossibility for many reasons. But that should not obviate the essential step of acknowledging Israel's role in the dispossession of Palestinian Arabs in 1948. S. Yizhar—as Israeli a writer as ever there was—began this essential work of self-reckoning with *Khirbet Khizeh* in 1949. While many have set out on the path that he opened a half-century ago, none has ever penetrated as deeply into the Israeli soul, exposing both its darkness and its light. ◆

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Washington Diarist

The Shrinker

"He is barometrically interesting." This was Irving Howe's judgment of a professor of literature whose prominence we were mischievously discussing. We were praising the guilelessness of barometers. They come right out and say it. The same candor about the weather is gained when a writer unexpectedly expresses himself in a way that requires no interpretation, and thereby exposes the *Geist* in the *Zeit*. It is always satisfying to see the errors of one's time clearly stated. I am grateful to *The New Yorker* for this satisfaction. I refer not to its deaf and blind publication, in the week that the economy was collapsing and the nation was panicking, of a piece about the millions that Leona Helmsley bequeathed to her dog. We are known by what we find important. But in the same issue there appeared a mincing and hostile essay by Louis Menand about Lionel Trilling, an expanded and worsened version of an introduction that he produced for a recent re-issue of *The Liberal Imagination*. The critic who, also in *The New Yorker*, compared Jay McInerney to Heinrich von Kleist now pronounces Trilling's work to be "small but subtle and distinctive." I should confess an interest here. Trilling was my teacher. My feelings about him are filial. His legend means nothing to me. But Menand is the latest in a long line of English professors in revolt against the legend. He has summoned the courage to suggest that Trilling was a man with anxieties and ambitions. He has some shallow things to say about the tangle of Trilling's Jewishness. And he contends that Trilling explored the political implications of culture because he held that "people have some sort of moral obligation to match up their taste in art and literature with their political opinions," which is wildly wrong. The synchronization of the realms, which was one of the crimes of Stalinism, was what Trilling deplored.

But what really rattles Menand is Trilling's magnitude. In his conception of the intellectual life, Trilling was big. Menand is the professor of littleness. He is a man in flight from the seriousness of his own vocation. In his telling, Trilling exemplified the era of "heroic criticism," whereas "it feels a little funny just typing the words today." I don't know, I just typed them and it felt fine. But Menand, you see, "went to graduate school after the nineteen-sixties, when the age of heroic criticism was over, and thank God." He has more to tell us about himself: "I became a critic because I wanted to write sentences like 'This intense conviction of the existence of the self apart from culture is, as culture well knows, its noblest and most generous achievement.'" Also: "I didn't care about the canon, and I didn't care much about Communism, either." I am not sure why he expects to be admired for his mental blitheness, but he is certainly not the only liberal for whom the Communists are as pertinent to us as the Donatists and the Cathars. "I just liked the way Trilling could turn a thought," he weirdly brags. But then he discovered that "there was a lot of righteousness, not to mention self-righteousness, back in the days of *Partisan Review*." Unlike in these post-heroic days, I suppose. And to what do we owe our exemption from grandeur, our release from gravity? Menand explains this—he knows, above all, how things work—in a passage that should move the parents of his students to demand the return of their tuition: "Most people don't use the language of approval and disapproval in their responses to art; they use the language of entertainment. They enjoy some things and don't enjoy other things. It just doesn't matter to them whether someone prefers Dreiser or James. This seemed to me to give literary criticism a lot less moral work to do." The less moral work, the better.

There is a term for the indifference and the perfunctoriness that Menand is espousing. It is philistinism. But this is a peculiar variety of philistinism, an airy and calculated mixture of Eustace Tilley and Richard Rorty. The language of entertainment: this is not be mistaken for any sort of aesthetic commitment. Aestheticism, in its desperation or in its delight, is more strenuous—Hamilton Hall strikes again!—than Menand's indolent ratification of popular taste. It is not pleasure that Menand is recommending, it is fun. (In an entry in her journals in 1963, which will be published later this year, Susan Sontag noted: "'Fun'—the American substitute for pleasure.") Is there any less toilsome engagement with culture, any less thoughtful and less lasting, any less salutary for this society, than the engagement with entertainment? Menand mocks Trilling's solemn pronouncement that "with that juxtaposition [of Dreiser and James] we are immediately at the bloody crossroads where literature and politics meet," inanely observing that "no actual blood has ever been spilled in disputes" about literature. He is a poor student of totalitarianism. But he will not allow that anything of consequence is at issue in the study of literature. He will not pick up the weight. Menand's objection to Trilling's "pretty dramatic" analysis of the choice between Dreiser and James is that "it makes it seem as though a lot is at stake in getting books right." The contribution to criticism of the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University is, ☺.

The complacence about mass opinion and the acquiescence in the authority of "most people," the relaxed whatever-ism, the preference for the shrug over the frown, comes from Rorty, to whom Menand once attributed "genius." Rorty, who gleefully and without recourse to argument exchanged objectivity for solidarity and reason for ethnocentrism, claimed that the true and the beautiful are whatever most people believe are the true and the beautiful. Or as Menand remarks, "there is no stable point outside a culture from which to critique it." No foundation for independence or dissidence, there; but then all that is over, and thank God. His experience in the faculty lounge has taught Menand that "all push becomes pull someday." All that is left for an intellectual to do is to understand the scene and to make it. There are no causes, there are only careers. But I swear I see pain and confusion and dread almost everywhere. Locally and globally, these are sordid times. Sweet, earnest, smart David Foster Wallace, who was his generation's model of the consecration to seriousness, just hanged himself. And we should chill? "It makes it seem as though a lot is at stake in getting books right": nobody will ever become a critic because they want to write sentences like that.

Leon Wieseltier

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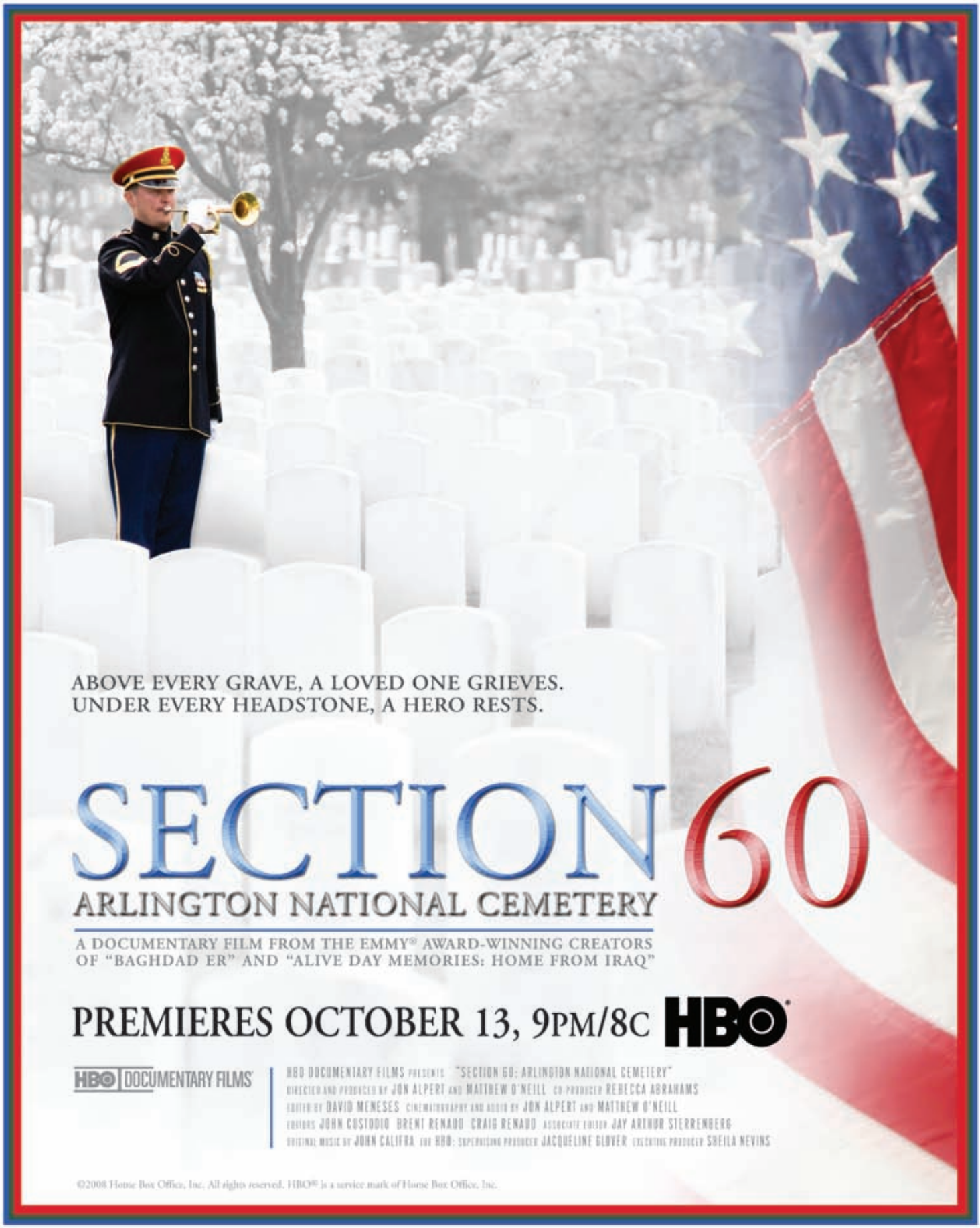
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